SFX

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

DOCTOR WHO

All-access for season one with Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson

DEAD BOY DETECTIVES
NEIL GAIMAN'S SANDMAN UNIVERSE EXPANDS

INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE
LOUIS AND LESTAT RETURN

INSIDE NO 9
FAREWELL TO THE BEST OF BRITISH

RENTAGHOST
REVISITING THE KIDS' TV CLASSIC

KINGDOM OF THE PLANET OF THE APES
More movie monkey business

PLUS! STAR TREK: DISCOVERY / BLOOD HUNT / DARK MATTER / SPACE GHOST / EVIL GODZILLA / CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON / ROBOFORCE / KILLDOZER!

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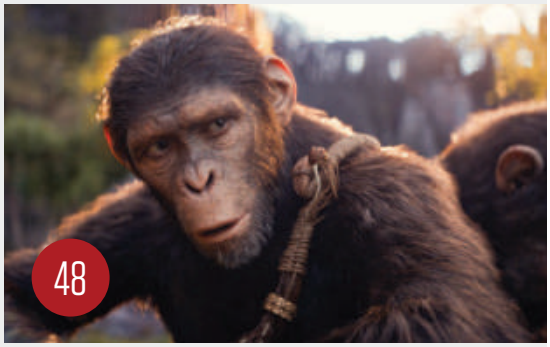

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Season one is here! Yes, we *can* count, thanks.

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Captain's Log

There's supposed to be a picture of me in the TARDIS here, but they've got lost in the space/time vortex somewhere... Regardless, here we go again – we're on the cusp of a new-new-new era of *Doctor Who* and it's *very* exciting! While everyone waits for 11 May (or 10 May, depending on which time zone you're in...) we've been beavering away, quite literally behind the scenes, working for over a year to bring you new and exciting content for Ncuti Gatwa's first season – and beyond!

It really does give me so much joy to be able to bring this to the fans, not least because we're lifelong fans here at *SFX*, but because nothing's guaranteed and the support of you, the reader, for our *Doctor Who* coverage last year has helped to make this possible. Tell your friends, tell the fans – we're in a(nother) golden age where great things are happening, and they should be picking up *SFX* every month!

So yes, you're going to be seeing a lot more of the good Doctor and his extended crew in these pages over the coming months – apologies if you're not a fan yet, hopefully we'll win you over – but you're also going to get world exclusive access to many other genre juggernauts too.

This issue alone we've got *Dead Boy Detectives* plus we go on set for the final series of *Inside No 9*, dive back into the world of Anne Rice for *Interview With The Vampire*, check out the latest *Planet Of The Apes* movie and take a deep dive into *Rentaghost*. Ridiculous! Where else would you get all that? See you in four weeks – hopefully with that photo...

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Rants & Raves

Inside the *SFX* hive mind

DARREN SCOTT EDITOR

RAVES

→ Absolutely *love* the chemistry between the Doctor and Ruby in "Space Babies". That's all you're getting!
→ Couldn't watch *Dead Boy Detectives* faster if I'd tried, a total box-ticker for me. Did you love *Lockwood & Co*? Then give this a go!
→ *Chucky* keeps getting weirder and wilder. The second half of season three is brilliant.
→ *40 Years Of Scream!* is a gorgeous book. Hope they do a full collection of the summer specials next...

RANTS

→ Really wanted to love *Them: The Scare*, but three episodes in there's a lot of police drama and not a lot of scares. Maybe it was singular.

IAN BERRIMAN DEPUTY EDITOR

RAVES

→ I've embarked on an *X-Files* rewatch. Loving it so far. How many series knock out a classic three episodes in? I might even make it through the post-Mulder seasons this time...
→ Looking forward to *Black Mirror*'s follow-up to "USS Callister". I fondly remember visiting the set of the original episode and watching the cast do some textbook "reacting to explosions" acting!
→ Pleased to see *The Search For Spock* is getting a theatrical reissue for its 40th anniversary (from 14 June). A group outing might be in order.
→ Though I wasn't wild about *The Batman*, the trailer for *The Penguin* has me intrigued. Still struggling to believe that's Colin Farrell.
→ If *Late Night With The Devil* didn't make it to a cinema near you, check it out on Shudder from 19 April. (You can always try the seven-day free trial.)

ED RICKETTS PRODUCTION EDITOR

RAVES

→ It's probably old hat to many, but this *Blake's 7* spoof/tribute from 2005 had me cackling: bit.ly/junction7

RANTS

→ The trailer for *Alien: Romulus* looks promising, in a "essentially remake the first film" way. But then we've been there with *Alien* trailers many times before... The game *Alien Isolation* still nails the ethos better than any recent flick.

NICK SETCHFIELD EDITOR-AT-LARGE

RAVES

→ Just read *Attack Warning Red!* by Julie McDowall, a fascinating account of Britain's plans for nuclear apocalypse in the Cold War. A chilling glimpse of an alternative world
→ Excited to hear that *Misty* is returning as a summer special on 17 July. Now how about a *Starlord* revival, Rebellion?

TARA BENNETT US EDITOR

RAVES

→ *Resident Alien* continues to be a rare show that takes its comedy just as seriously as its UFO lore. Hilarious, heartwarming and increasingly chilling each season. Renew it!

RANTS

→ Can we retire the *Ghostbusters* franchise after the horrible *Frozen Empire*? The dead deserve better.

THE FUTURE FIRST!

Red Alert

MAY 2024

→ NEWS //// INTERVIEWS //// INSIGHT //// VARYING SCALES!

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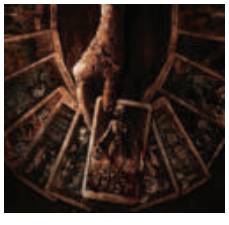
THE WORLD AT STAKE

Marvel's new vampire crossover *Blood Hunt* is here

Highlights



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TAROT
→ Pick a card... Oh, probably not that one, actually. A host of horrors await as you shuffle.

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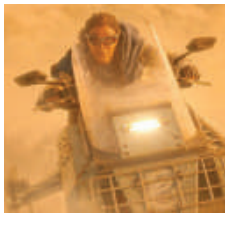
CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON
→ Gill power: the sassy swamp monster is back.



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STAR TREK
→ Captain Burnham herself, Sonequa Martin-Green, reflects on five seasons of *Discovery*.

DIRECTORS EXCLUSIVE

Play Your Cards Right

Spenser Cohen and Anna Halberg on how fate dealt a hand for **Tarot**

WORDS: **STEVE O'BRIEN**

GIVEN THE SHEER VOLUME OF horror movies, it's surprising how few have exploited the subject of tarot. Sure, it's featured – in films from *Live And Let Die* to *The Mortal Instruments: City Of Bones* to *A Dark Song* – but barely any have made these mystical cards central to the story.

"It's crazy to think that tarot has been around for hundreds of years and no one's really made a movie about it," writer/director Anna Halberg tells Red Alert, somewhat incredulously. "They're so iconic and so inherently scary. I have friends who refuse to get readings done, because they just don't want to know just in case."

Tarot is the first co-directing feature credit for Halbert and her creative partner Spenser Cohen. In 2022 the two wrote (with Cohen directing) a horror short titled "Blink". The film impressed Screen Gems, who promptly approached the duo about helming what would become *Tarot*. "We started writing the movie during Covid, and I feel like horror movies work the best when they reflect what's going on in society or culture at the time," Halberg suggests. "At that point, society was in a very uncertain place, and we saw this rise in astrology and tarot on social media. People who were looking to all these ancient practices to make sense of the world and to find answers and some certainty for the future. So it felt like a really ripe idea."

Tarot centres on a group of college friends who start dying in ways that are related to their fortunes after having their tarot cards read. Halberg says the pair approached the film "like a *Twilight Zone* episode" (both are massive fans of the anthology series), while Cohen explains that they were aiming for a combination of "Steven Spielberg and James Wan... So a fun movie with fun scares."

Halberg says they went into *Tarot* intending to make a PG-13 horror – meaning, presumably, less of a reliance on blood and guts.

"I've never found gore particularly scary," she says. "Most of the time we feel it's what you don't see and where the audience uses their imagination that's scarier than what you do see. For us, it's really about the tension and insinuating what's happening instead of showing it on screen."

Paige (Avantika Vandanapu): oh dear...

Elise (Larsen Thompson): health and safety scandal.

Harriet Slater as Haley: dodgy kebab, maybe?

Humberly González as Madeline: oh dear...

Adain Bradley as Grant and Jacob Batalon as Paxton.

"We always go back to older movies," adds Cohen. "We looked at *Alien* a lot – there's not a missed second in that film, it's just perfect. We also looked at John Carpenter's *The Thing*, and we looked at *Jaws*. We were always going back to these movies from the '60s, '70s and '80s to be inspired by – those are our favourites."

Halbert and Cohen have known each other for nearly two decades (both graduated in Film and Television Production from the University of Southern California) and have collaborated on such movies as *Expend4bles* and *Extinction*, but this is their first co-directing gig.

It's rare for a film to be directed by two people, unless they're siblings (see the Wachowskis, the Coens and the Hughes). So how does it work, exactly?

"Well, Anna and I are basically siblings – not by blood, but we've worked together for half our lives, and we're best friends," beams Cohen. "We even finish each others' sentences," adds Halberg. "We make sure when we're on set, when we're having communications with actors or department heads, that they don't need to get sign off from both of us, that we speak for each other."

> **"For us, it's really about the tension and insinuating what's happening"**

With both having been credited as screenwriters before, they admit it's enormously satisfying to finally be in charge of bringing their script to the screen.

"When you write something," says Cohen, "it goes through the studio process, and everything gets interpreted, and by the time it gets onto the screen sometimes you recognise parts of it and sometimes you don't. This is the first time where we really felt like [with] what we set out to do, once we got to the end of the process, that it was all exactly as we wanted."

At the moment, both are waiting for *Tarot* to be unleashed on audiences ("We're nervous and excited," says Cohen), and also planning their next move as writer/directors. It seems that, like their favourite television show *The Twilight Zone*, they're looking to tell a variety of stories in different genres.

"We focus a lot on elevated genre," says Halberg. "So whether that's horror or science fiction or action thrillers, it's always stuff that's a little bit left of centre or five minutes in the future.

"So we're definitely excited to play in different arenas, but I do think there's a throughline for all of the ideas that we get excited about."

Tarot is in cinemas from 10 May.

SCI-FACT! **"Blink" starred Sophie Thatcher as a woman only able to communicate with her eyes after being attacked by an entity.**

Blood Hunt cover art for issue one, by Pepe Larraz.

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Earth's Deathliest Heroes

The vampire apocalypse is descending on the Marvel Universe in **Blood Hunt** and **Union Jack The Ripper** WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

Wraparound cover for *Blood Hunt* issue one, by Leinil Yu.

NOT ONLY MARVEL'S biggest summer crossover for several years, *Blood Hunt* is also set to be the goriest ever, with writer Jed MacKay and artist Pepe Larraz producing not only the standard five-parter but also expanded, polybagged Red Band editions, which will depict the gruesome events that unfold in even more graphic detail.

"They're pretty horrific!" MacKay tells Red Alert. "We looked at ways to create a more horrific version of our issues and [editor] Tom Brevoort, Pepe and I talked it over and identified sections to be redrawn. Pepe went wild and came up with some particularly gnarly stuff!"

Beginning with various vampire factions using malevolent Darkforce energy to block out the Sun, the core five-parter draws on plot threads from MacKay's other Marvel books.

"While it grows out of what's going on in *Moon Knight*, *Avengers* and *Doctor Strange*, it also acts as a culmination for older Marvel vampire stories, bringing things to a bloody head for 2024," he says. "Marvel vampires have spent a long time in the shadows, and as vampires don't exactly step into the light, it's about time they brought the rest of us into those shadows with them."

Also appearing is Miles Morales's Spider-Man, alongside Blade's daughter Brielle Brooks from last year's *Bloodline* and, of course, the Daywalker himself. "You can't have a vampire event without Blade!" laughs MacKay. "We'll also be introducing a team of super-vampires called the Bloodcoven, who are effectively the Avengers of the vampire world, and who have been designed to perfection by Pepe."

With Danny Lore and Vincenzo Carratù teaming up on the three-part *Dracula: Blood Hunt*, the Prince of Darkness also plays a significant role. "There's a really fun intersection of classic vampire horror and superhero stuff," says MacKay. "On the surface, Dracula being an active participant in the Marvel Universe seems absurd, but there's something about it that just works. We're trying to lean into that horror vibe as we're stepping up the stakes and desperation of the situation.

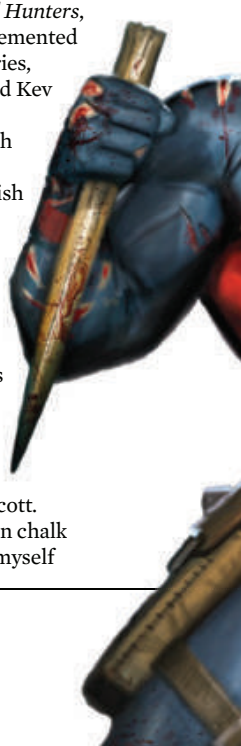
"Our heroes are staring down the barrel of an extinction-level challenge, and one that, from the jump, they're losing," he continues. "The choices made during this long night will have significant repercussions to come and will leave the world in a much different and unexpected shape in the following months."

More art from *Blood Hunt*.

Union Jack The Ripper issue two cover, by Rod Reis.

From *Black Panther: Blood Hunt* to anthology series *Blood Hunters*, *Blood Hunt* will be supplemented by numerous spin-off series, including Cavan Scott and Kev Walker's *Union Jack The Ripper: Blood Hunt*, which explores the ensuing Armageddon from a British perspective.

"I loved the fact that Joe Chapman is a working class hero with no powers but shedloads of attitude compared to Captain Britain, who was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and was, let's face it, pretty damned all-powerful thanks to Merlin," says Scott. "They may well have been chalk and cheese, and I found myself



RYAN BROWN

> **Marvel vampires have spent a long time in the shadows**

instantly rooting for the scrappier, more sarcastic Jack. And that was before I learned that he had a history fighting vampires!"

Indeed Chapman and his two predecessors as Union Jack have battled various incarnations of German vampire Baron Blood, dating back to the Second World War.

"The connection will be mentioned but this isn't just another Baron Blood story," continues Scott. "Union Jack's history with vampires definitely informs some of the choices he makes in this series, but we'll see him face another bloodsucker from Marvel's pantheon of the undead."

After the "cute and friendly vibe" of his recent *Guardians Of The Galaxy* run, Walker is embracing Union Jack's grittier vibe and harking back to his formative work on series like *ABC Warriors* for the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. "It's liberating not to pull any punches and I'm trying to recall some of my early *2000 AD* muscle memory," he says.

The title is set in Union Jack's hometown of Manchester, which according to Scott has "gone through a nightmarish transformation", and the Huddersfield-based Walker is enjoying depicting a setting that isn't quite so far from his door. "I have to keep reminding myself this is the Marvel Universe version of Manchester," he says. "So it's more about finding the flavour of the North amongst a vampire apocalypse."

Blood Hunt issue one is out 1 May. Union Jack The Ripper: Blood Hunt issue one is out on 15 May.

SCI-FACT! **Dracula was first pitted against a Marvel superhero in 1974's *Giant-Sized Spider-Man And Dracula*.**

NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ He yam what he yam! New **Popeye** movie in development.
→ DC bringing **Teen Titans** to the big screen with a script by Ana Nogueira.
→ Joe Dante directing **Little Shop Of Halloween Horrors** for Roger Corman.
→ Wendell Pierce playing Daily Planet head honcho Perry White in James Gunn's **Superman**.
→ **Venom: The Last Dance** arrives 25 October 2024.
→ Neve Campbell returns for **Scream VII**, directed by franchise creator Kevin Williamson.
→ Rebecca Ferguson joining Chris Pratt in SF film **Mercy**, directed by *Wanted*'s Timur Bekmambetov.
→ The makers of *Winnie The Pooh: Blood And Honey* launching the Twisted Childhood Universe with **Poohniverse: Monsters Assemble**, set for 2025.
→ Matt Reeves' **The Batman Part II** bumped back a Bat-year to 2 October 2026.
→ Margot Robbie producing a movie version of popular videogame **The Sims**.
→ Patty Jenkins back on board **Star Wars: Rogue Squadron** for Lucasfilm. Do keep up!

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CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Double Take

Dark Matter creator Blake Crouch reveals the perks of adapting his own book into a challenging sci-fi noir series

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

Joel Edgerton as Jason Dessen – one of them...

WHEN IT COMES TO NOVELISTS having their books adapted for film or television, the rule of thumb is Hollywood rarely invites them to help in that process. So when someone bucks that trend – as is the case with writer Blake Crouch – it's worth taking note.

Since 2004, Crouch has published more than a dozen books, with three being adapted into series. With *Wayward Pines* and *Good Behaviour*, he was hired as a staff writer. For the latest, *Dark Matter*, Apple TV+'s adaptation of his 2016 book, Crouch is showrunner, responsible for bringing his quantum mechanics-infused mystery to life.

Crouch tells Red Alert that after years trying to adapt *Dark Matter* into a film, multiple script drafts made it clear that the book's emotional relationships were getting short-changed. "It really dawned on me that it would be a real tragedy and a disservice to this book to live in that feature space," he says.

Sony Pictures, who optioned the book, then let Crouch take it to television. "Literally the moment they said that, I suddenly had this complete vision of what the show was and where the episodes broke out, and we were off and running."

In the series, Jason Dessen (Joel Edgerton) is a high school physics teacher in a slightly frosty marriage to Daniela (Jennifer Connelly), sharing a better relationship with his teenage son, Charlie (Oakes Fegley). When his former colleague (Jimmi Simpson) wins a prestigious prize based on theories they both worked on, Jason wonders about his path not taken – until he's kidnapped and wakes up in an alternate version of his life where he's now famous but has no family. Meanwhile, another version of himself (Jason 2) slips into his original life.

A story with multiple timelines and realities, Crouch says from the start they had to really dig into what show they wanted to make, because it could have gone in a number of ways. "You're gonna see many versions of

Joel Edgerton as Jason Dessen – one of them...

> **"I suddenly had this complete vision of what the show was and where the episodes broke"**

The series gives well-known supporting actor Edgerton (Owen Lars in the *Star Wars* franchise) a chance to shine in the lead as the Jasons, and also to serve as an executive producer. Crouch says he was a long-time admirer of the actor, but had never met him before this series.

"Joel read the book and heard there was a show in the works, so his was an incoming call which almost never happens," he says of the actor's active pitch to be cast. "The idea of him stepping into this and really just embracing it was super appealing to me. When we talked, he kept mentioning '80s-era Harrison Ford, that kind of a vibe which I thought was really exciting."

Crouch says audiences will be impressed by Edgerton, who is called to shift personas often. "He really has a very different physicality to Jason 2, as opposed to Jason 1. With 2, there's a lot more confidence and a little bit more swagger. But a lot of it is subtle stuff."

The writer says this adaptation also served as an opportunity to perform a "do over" with his book. "I looked at it as a chance to take what I think was a really good thing and make it better," he says. "To improve on it in certain areas and to lean heavily into the stuff that worked.

"Like for instance, [the book] is single POV. I really love the idea, as you see in the first couple of episodes, of living in the world of Daniela with an imposter, and waiting for that mask to slip. Frankly, it was probably something I should have done in the book, in hindsight."

Asked if that extends to adding new story if the series is renewed, Crouch says they didn't hold anything back while making this season. "We said we're gonna leave it all on the field and use up every bit of the book and more," he explains.

"We'll see if we feel there's more stories to tell. So we treated it like a limited series. But of course, there's an open-endedness to it. I think it has more life left, and quite a bit more. But not in the sense that we held anything back."

Dark Matter is on Apple TV+ from 8 May.

Jennifer Connelly and Joel Edgerton," he says of their characters. "But we never wanted it to feel like a skit. We always wanted their characters – and even the other versions – to feel close to the core character we are following.

"That philosophy carried on into the worlds. We wanted *Dark Matter* to have this grounded, little bit of a noir aesthetic that wore its sci-fi identity proudly, but didn't shove it in your face."

Jennifer Connelly as Daniela, with a Jason.

SCI-FACT! **Blake Crouch's *Wayward Pines* trilogy was adapted into a series by M Night Shyamalan. Crouch wrote several episodes.**

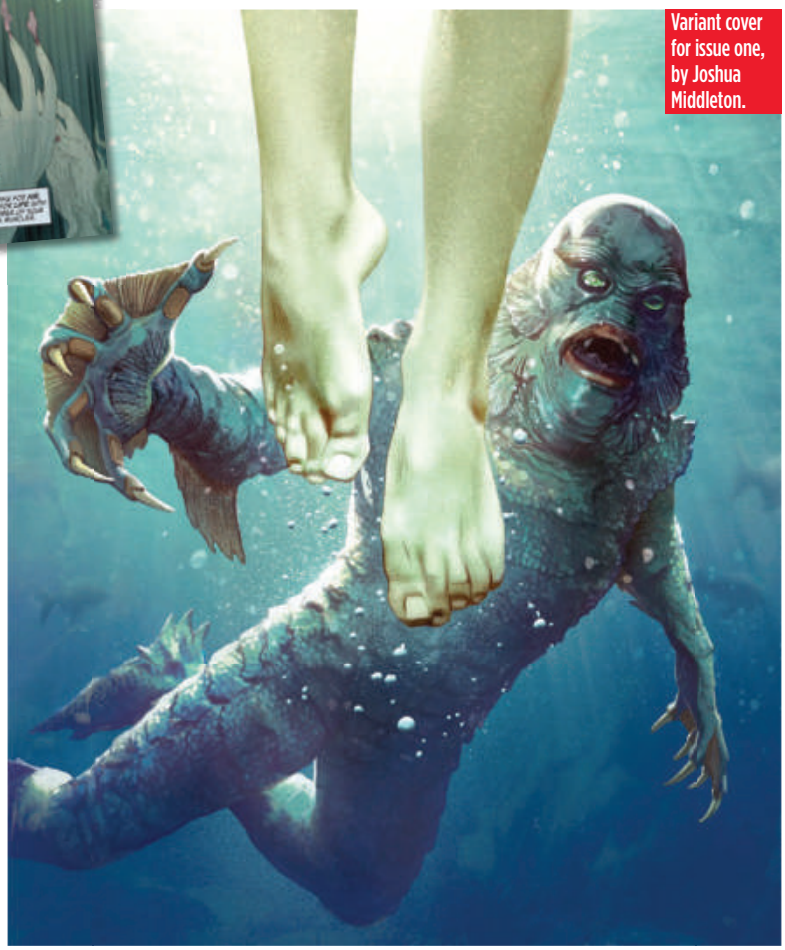
SCI-FACT! **Skybound Entertainment's next Universal Monsters series is *Frankenstein*, by writer/artist Michael Walsh, due out in August.**

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Aquaman

Skybound brings back the iconic Gill-man in **Universal Monsters: Creature From The Black Lagoon Lives**

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**



Variant cover for issue one, by Joshua Middleton.

WHILE *DRACULA* was an adaptation of the original 1931 film, *Creature From The Black Lagoon Lives* – the second salvo in Skybound Entertainment's Universal Monsters comic book line – is a sequel to the 1954 horror classic.

"I love the Universal Monsters as a whole," says Dan Watters, who is co-writing the four-parter with Ram V. "They're all these beautiful snapshots of a point in time, and the things people were scared of back then. The idea here is to take those roots and apply them to what we're scared of now."

Watters believes that the Gill-man, which appeared on-screen in *Creature From The Black Lagoon* and its two sequels, 1955's *Revenge Of The Creature* and 1956's *The Creature Walks Among Us*, has plenty of potential. "The Creature doesn't feel like a monster that needs to be constrained to a single story or a group of human characters," he says. "It's a dark mirror onto which a plethora of human fears and desires can be projected, so we wanted to expand that and take it to some fresh, darker places."

Rather than being a present-day update, *Creature From The Black Lagoon Lives* takes place in the '80s, several decades after the conclusion of the first film. "We wanted to create a period piece in between the time of the film and now," says Watters. "Partly we're exploring how we got from there to here, particularly as far as the rainforest is concerned."

The story centres on journalist Kate Marsden, who journeys to South America after an attempt to locate notorious serial killer Darwin Collier goes awry. "He ends up catching up with her instead, and after surviving an attempted drowning in the Hudson river, Kate comes out of the water changed," teases Watters. "Now she wants justice or revenge, and she's not quite sure which herself. When Collier flees the country, she's entirely willing to track him doggedly to where Peru borders Brazil in the depths of the Amazon, in a secluded town a few miles from a certain lagoon."

While the majority of the characters have been created by Watters and V, we can also expect to see the mysterious Dr Edwin Thompson, who was played on-screen by Whit Bissell.

"Thompson was viciously savaged by the Creature in the movie and this has had an understandably significant impact on his life, so he's pretty upset," explains Watters. "The rest of the cast are new and are players in a game of murderous cat and mouse, which leads them into the Creature's territory."

Describing his depiction of the Creature on the cover of the first issue as "just perfect", Watters is enjoying working with artist Matthew Roberts (and colourist Dave Stewart). "His Creature is inhuman and imposing, but there's an intelligence in its eyes, which is exactly what we needed, delivered with aplomb," he says. "The other thing is the underwater scenes, which can be tricky to get right, but Matthew and Dave nailed it every time. There's real depth to it."

Creature From The Black Lagoon Lives issue one is out on 24 April.

SCI-FACT! **The first US Godzilla comic, *Godzilla: King Of The Monsters*, was published by Marvel from 1977-1979.**

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

Monster Mash-up

IDW celebrates **Godzilla's** 70th birthday with a special anniversary one-shot

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

MARKING THE 70TH anniversary of the King of the Monsters' first appearance in 1954's *Godzilla*, IDW is releasing a special 100-page one-shot featuring nine stories by creators such as EJ Su, Danny Lore and Liana Kangas.

James Stokoe previously wrote and drew five-parter *Godzilla: The Half-Century War* as well as issue one of anthology *Godzilla In Hell*. His contribution harks back to when he first saw 1964's *Mothra Vs Godzilla* as a six-year-old. "My story owes a lot to the more light-hearted aspects shown in that era of Godzilla films," he explains.

"It's set in the same time as *The Half-Century War*, this time in '70s Istanbul. There are some returning familiar faces, but mostly it's about an Anti-Megalosaurus team that's been tasked to deal with Hedorah, and what a truly awful job that would be to do."

Asking what he describes as "the inevitable question: 'What would you do if a giant monster came crashing through town?'" Adam Gorham explores the devastating impact such a gargantuan beast would have on a heavily populated metropolis.

"It's the same question we ask ourselves about natural disasters, slasher movies or zombie stories," he says. "That was the starting point for this particular story, which at the heart is about a man struggling to leave behind everything he values in the wake of destruction. On top of that, I have the great pleasure of creating a new foe for Godzilla to fight, and I am told that its nature is a first for [Japanese film company] Toho, so I'm super-excited about it."

Teaming up with artist Joëlle Jones, Dan DiDio also tapped into the films, TV shows and toys of his childhood. "In crafting my Godzilla story, I approached it as if I was making the Godzilla mini-movie I would want to see on a Saturday morning," he says. "As a long-time Godzilla fan, I wanted to tell a story where, once again, humanity affects the balance of nature and creates a worldwide threat that Godzilla needs to stop.

"I also tried to include elements like the rooftop news reporters as a callback to classic Godzilla moments. And of course there's a Kaiju fight, which, best of all, is drawn by Joëlle Jones."

"Our story begins with a birth and ends with a death," adds Michael W Conrad, who is paired with artist Gegê Schall. "It's a bittersweet examination into what Godzilla means to the central character, who has dedicated his life to its study. In many ways, the story can be seen as a meditation on mortality, but we don't allow our philosophical musings to detract from what makes Godzilla such a blast to work on and read.

"This is a dream project for us both, and an opportunity to add our little bit of spice to the rich history of one of the world's most beloved characters!"

Godzilla: 70th Anniversary issue one is out on 8 May.

(Clockwise) Covers by E J Su, Sophie Campbell, Tom Whalen and Jeffrey Zornow.

SCI-FACT! **A new spin-off film from *Discovery*, *Star Trek: Section 31* starring Michelle Yeoh, has recently wrapped production.**

ACTOR EXCLUSIVE

Wonder Woman

Sonequa Martin-Green on her journey to *Star Trek: Discovery*'s final season

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT** /// PORTRAIT: **SARAH COULTER**

The inevitable question: what did you steal from the set?

I got my name plaque that goes on the back of your cast chair, and they also gifted me with my producer's chair as well. So I have both things!

Was there a moment when you felt the show had arrived, or did you have that from the start?

To be honest with you, no, we did not have it from the start. We had a troubled start. From what I understand, every iteration has a challenge before them at the beginning. I do believe that we were kind of on wobbly legs. We were walking with purpose and intention and passion, and trying to walk with excellence as much as we possibly could, but we were still wobbling. We really were.

I feel personally that we found our *distinct* identity in season three when we separated from the timeline, when we jumped ahead past where any *Trek* had ever gone. We were able to establish ourselves in a new way at that point. I really appreciate where we were placed. I appreciate all those connected tissues, but I also appreciate that we were able to build anew, because I believe every *Trek* has a responsibility to do that.

If you want to hold true to the essence of *Trek* itself then you have to keep pressing forward. You have to keep encouraging people to look forward, look forward, look forward. So I feel that we really sunk into who we were supposed to be by season three. We built off seasons one and two. I even love how we stay connected, even through seasons three, four and five – we never lost it. We never lost where we came from. But we also found so many new things. We found new life.

How do you feel about your part in history – or is it just a job?

Oh goodness no, it couldn't be further from just a job, it's on the opposite end of that spectrum. Honestly, I can't take full credit for it. I believe that God blessed me with this and the blessing is multi-layered. I praise Jesus for it, because even now I am learning.

I am learning more of how it impacted me, personally. Every day I feel like another layer of understanding comes to me, or I drop to a deeper level of understanding about what it is and what it's meant to me, and how it's changed me, and how it's matured me. I do look back on it now in this more complete way than I did when I was in the midst of it, because I had an understanding when I was *doing* it. But, as you know, when you're in the midst of it, your experience is different than when you're looking back with that 20/20 hindsight vision.

There is no part of my life that was not touched, that was not deepened or expanded or heightened as a result of it. My relationships, my friendships, those lifetime connections that we all made from this show and from telling this story together.

Even as a black woman it helped me grow, and it helped me understand that I don't have to fight for my worth, I don't have to fight to be valued; that that is something that was imposed *on* me in the environment I grew up in, and God used *Discovery* to help heal me of that. And that's no small thing. He used *Discovery* to teach me what a leader really looks like.

Are you open to reprising the role?

Oh yes, I'm definitely open. Not only am I open to it, I can speak for everybody and say that I think everyone would be open to that. We were blessed to bring these characters to life, and I have so much love and respect for our writers, and for the synergy that we found. I really feel that we found this lovely dance, and there were so many stories that we could have told, that I wish we could have told – and I don't think I just speak for myself with that either. I definitely would come back at any point and reprise.

Sonequa Martin-Green as Michael Burnham.

Five huge cinematic seasons is a big achievement.

Yes, it is. And the landscape of TV has changed. So yes, it's five cinematic seasons, it means something different than it did 10 years ago. And yeah, we did it... 'cause there were definitely times in those early days where we thought, "Can we do this? Can we basically do a movie every 10 days or so?" [Laughs] "Are we going to be able to accomplish this?" And we did, we did.

Star Trek: Discovery is on Paramount+.

> “It couldn’t be further from being just a job, it’s on the opposite end of that spectrum”

NEWS WARP
HIGH-SPEED INFORMATION

→ Apple TV+ to bring William Gibson’s cyberpunk classic **Neuromancer** to the screen as a ten-part series.
→ CBS renewing **Ghosts** for a fourth season.
→ *The Alienist*’s Douglas Smith playing Jimmy Olsen in season four of **Superman & Lois**.

→ Filming on season two of **Peacemaker** set to kick off this summer.
→ Prime Video’s **Upload** returning for a fourth and final season.
→ **The Wizards Of Waverly Place** revival greenlit for a full series with Selena Gomez and David Henrie.
→ Lionsgate Television’s new **Twilight** series will be animated.
→ A **Nova** series in early development at Marvel.
→ **Avatar: The Last Airbender** renewed for two more seasons on Netflix.
→ **Black Mirror** returning for a seventh season in 2025, complete with a sequel to season four’s “USS Callister”.
→ Elijah Wood, Randall Park and Yvette Nicole Brown voicing animated series based on videogame **Among Us**.
→ **The Lazarus Project** cancelled after two seasons.

STEPHANE CARDINALE, CORBIS/GETTY

ACTOR EXCLUSIVE

Devil In The Details

Katja Herbers on what horrors await Dr Bouchard and her team in the final season of **Evil**

WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

Katja Herbers as Dr Kristen Bouchard: it's hammer time!

IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS SINCE *EVIL* premiered as a procedural mystery with supernatural proclivities, exploring the intersection of faith and science. The show's premise has the Catholic Church hiring two atheists – forensic psychologist Dr Kristen Bouchard (Katja Herbers) and tech expert Ben Shakir (Aasif Mandvi) – to join seminarian (now priest) David Acosta (Mike Colter) to investigate cases having to do with possession or demonic intervention.

Sounds pretty staid, but the level of crazy that's unfolded across three seasons has made *Evil* one of the most insane yet addictive shows since *The X-Files*. From apocalyptic codex cases to Bouchard's daughter having a secret tail, the show goes places no one would expect. Yet creators Robert and Michelle King have kept it grounded and intellectually daring.

Evil's fourth and final season will have four bonus episodes to wrap up the many outstanding plots, such as Bouchard's missing – and possibly demonically corrupted – IVF eggs and the wicked machinations of Dr Leland Townsend (Michael Emerson), which might include the end of the world...

In the season three finale "The Demon Of The End", Bouchard's house was infected with spiritual demons, while her husband Andy (Patrick Brammall) was finally released back home – albeit changed by Townsend and her possessed mother Sheryl (Christine Lahti).

"Kristen is very resilient," actress Katja Herbers tells Red Alert, reflecting on the insanity her character has faced. "But she bounces back. In this season... it's gotten so absurd. At the end of season three she is finding out that Leland has impregnated a surrogate. Her mom was involved in this and [the baby] is supposed to be the Antichrist. She just started laughing.

"It's just too much," the actress smiles, "so Kristen decides if there are people in this world trying to control you with their evil nonsense, it's just not worth getting upset about it. Just fuck it!"

Bouchard normally has a curious, open-minded approach to the world and what they investigate. Herbers says that she'll be far less patient in this last season – for example, in her attitude towards her bohemian mother.

"She's a very troubled woman," she says of how Bouchard now sees Sheryl. "Christine plays it beautifully, so you do understand that Leland has the power to really brainwash someone, and he plays into her insecurities. He gives her that potion that's supposed to make her look younger that's addictive to her, and

Kristen's having an '80s pop video moment.

Aasif Mandvi as Ben Shakir and Mike Colter as David Acosta.

> She's decided she wants to do away with anything that has to do with religion

she probably thinks she can manipulate him. Now this baby is happening. From Kristen's perspective, it's kind of game over between them. I don't know how you come back from that. That's not even the half of it yet, because [Kristen] doesn't know what she did to Andy."

Speaking of her mountaineering hubby, Kristen begged God in prayer for him to be alive – and he is. But he's not quite right. Herbers says that Townsend has definitely got into Andy's head in a very bad way.

"He is being fed jealousy by Leland," she says about lies implying that Kristen slept with David. "It gets into his head and he accuses me of it, and goes to David. I love that story because obviously there *has* been stuff going on between them, although they've never slept together. But they did kiss."

Plus, there's the "demon Kristen" doppelgänger David has manifested. "So, David has some weird guilt of something that didn't happen, but did... but didn't," she laughs.

Herbers says that Kristen's stronger rejection of religion will create a wedge between her and David. "It changes things a little bit between David and Kristen. They were getting very close again, and she looked at his perspective, like maybe there was some sense to what he's saying. This season, she's decided she wants to do away with everything that has anything to do with religion. It's *just* science and she is not willing to move from that."

Isabella (Stella Everett): "Oh dear, my foot is stuck. Help."

Viewers have been drawn to David and Kristen's relationship over the years. Are they ultimately meant to be together? Herbers says there is a genuine connection. "They could be together were it not this, and I think they've accepted that," she says.

"I like that it has morphed into just friendship and respect. But I think at any point, they could both tap into the longing and do it, so there's always a lot at play there. I like that. It's sort of infinite in its possibilities – and not-possibilities. It's always good for a character to want something that they *can't* have."

Making use of an eclectic array of topics, from pig swill insanity to hurricanes, *Evil*'s finale season will, Herbers says, continue to provoke audiences about everyday inhumanities while resolving its mythology too. "That's what I love about what we do with the procedural elements," she closes. "It being so much about the now we live in is great."

Evil season four is on Paramount+ in May.

SCI-FACT! **Marti Matulis, who plays George the demon in *Evil*, is also Vane in *The Mandalorian* and Piggy Man in *American Horror Story*.**

SCI-FACT! **A screenwriter and playwright, Sizemore adapted *Howl's Moving Castle* for the London stage in 2004.**

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Hound Of Love

Storm Kids make a return visit to Hades with **Fetch Book Two**

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

STEMMING FROM A conversation writer Mike Sizemore had with Storm King Comics CEO Sandy King, *Fetch* demonstrates the lengths people will go to for their four-legged friends. Illustrated by Dave Kennedy, the middle-school-age graphic novel series begins with 12-year-old Danni traveling to Hades to rescue her late dog, Pirate.

"The bare bones of the core idea had been rattling around in my head for a while," Sizemore tells Red Alert. "Sandy's dog had recently passed away so we were talking about our pets when I said, 'I have a story that would be perfect for Storm Kids...' and it was greenlit there and then."

Sizemore was raised on a diet of Ray Harryhausen's movies, and *Fetch* embodies his childhood love of Greek mythology – especially Homer's Odyssey. "Odysseus is such a fun character because he's a bit of a doofus," he laughs. "He'd have been home in half the time if he didn't keep messing up.

"So I had this idea that while the other Homeric heroes would have gone straight to the Elysian Fields, maybe Odysseus somehow never got there. From there, teaming him up with Danni was just obvious."

Sizemore also taps into his long-time love of *2000 AD*. "Its influence is in everything I do," he says. "With *Fetch*, we have a strong female lead, some crazy sidekicks and a Hero with a capital H, which are all *2000 AD* mainstays."

OH MY GOD I'M IN HADES!
AND SAMMY...WHERE IS SAMMY?
HELP ME FIND SAMMY YOU STUPID...
I AM HADES' PROTECTOR, HELL'S GUARDIAN, THE UNDERWORLD'S GATEKEEP--
HOW DARE YOU EVEN APPROACH THE SENTINEL OF--
HUH?
DOGGY!

"Here, Cerberus! Good boy, Cerbie!" Worth a try.

FRESH HELL

Sizemore has added a contemporary edge to the ancient legends. "I wanted to get away from the dark cavernous idea of the Underworld and also put a splash of modern colour on its inhabitants, so in my version of Hades and Olympus the gods have cellphones and Charon drives a cab. It's bright, lush and colourful, perfect for a kid's adventure."

Described by Sizemore as "an old soul for sure," Danni experienced some dangerous situations in *Book One: The Journey*, which stand her in good stead for upcoming second instalment *Book Two: The Rescue*. "She did a lot of growing up after her dog died and also feels responsible for her younger brother, Sammy, who is autistic," says Sizemore.

"I kind of put her through the wringer in *Book One* by unexpectedly, and literally, dropping Sammy into the adventure with her and then teaming her up with a slightly unreliable guide. She certainly grows in character, but by the end of the first book, she's in tears yet more determined than ever. I've already had feedback from younger readers who love her and Sammy and hate that I left them on a cliffhanger, so I can't wait to hear what they think of the next book."

As Sammy is taken hostage by Hades himself, Danni is plunged into even more peril in *The Rescue*. "I've kept the classical references light in *Book Two* as I wanted the characters we've already met to have space to develop rather than introduce another pantheon of gods and monsters," he adds. ●

Fetch Book Two: The Rescue is out on 8 May.

SCI-FACT! **Other NacelleVerse properties include Wild West C.O.W.-Boys Of Moo Mesa and The Great Garloo.**

(Centre) Main cover art for issue one, by Dustin Weaver.

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Toy Story

The first offering from the NacelleVerse sees '80s toy line **RoboForce** making a return

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

NUMEROUS OBSCURE toy lines such as Biker Mice From Mars, Powerlords and Sectaurs: Warriors Of Symbion have now been assembled into a shared universe, called the NacelleVerse. It's launching with *RoboForce*, which is currently being turned into an animated series, co-produced by the Nacelle Company and Dwayne Johnson, and Dany Garcia's Seven Buck Productions. Spinning out of last month's *NacelleVerse* one-shot, it will be preceded by a three-issue miniseries from Oni Press, which acts as a prequel to the cartoon.

"It sounded like a really fun challenge to try and work to reintroduce them in comic book form," says writer Melissa Flores, who is working closely with Nacelle's Brian Volk-Weiss and Matt Kravitsky. "Brian has such a specific vision on how he's planning on adapting these properties and the way he's updating and redeveloping them is unique to every property."

Created by the Ideal Toy Company in 1984, RoboForce was revived by Toyfinity in 2013, who subsequently sold the rights to Nacelle in 2021. "It's become something completely brand new and the characters have been forged into relatable, complicated heroes," says Flores. "It's so fun to see these robots being given a completely new life. I've been very lucky that Brian and Mike have given me the flexibility and opportunity to give these characters real stakes and take them on an adventure that has very real consequences that ripple into the [animated] series itself."

Illustrated by Diogenes Neves, *RoboForce* centres around a group of advanced robots, who were created by genius Soraya Aviram in order to help change the world, only to be superceded by rival Silas Duke's superior Utopia Aegis 101 line of bots.

"Our story takes place in a future version of Detroit, where Earth has become home to robots, humans and aliens alike," explains Flores. "These robots, who are programmed to be a team of incredible heroes, are now considered obsolete and are completely overshadowed by a different group of automatons run by a large corporation. Maxx-89, our hero, was programmed to be the leader of RoboForce, but now he's searching for direction and is trying to figure out who he is – since it doesn't look like he's going to be the amazing robot that he was meant to be.

"Soraya is working on something big that she hopes will put them all back on top, and the rest of RoboForce is just trying to make their way in the world to varying degrees of success."

RoboForce will be followed in July by a *Biker Mice From Mars* three-parter, while *Sectaurs* and *Power Lords* will receive their own limited series later in the year. As hinted at in *NacelleVerse* issue zero, we can expect to see some connections between the different properties.

"Detroit in *RoboForce* is a huge melting pot and you do see some cameos and characters that appeared in the zero issue," teases Flores. "Every single one of these characters has their own story and their home, but that doesn't mean they don't intersect and intertwine with each other's stories."

RoboForce issue one is out 17 April.

SCI-FACT! **The first *Space Ghost* comic, featuring artwork by the late Dan Spiegle, was published by Gold Key in 1967.**

WRITER EXCLUSIVE

Guardian Of The Galaxy

After Thundercats, it's **Space Ghost**'s turn to rise again at Dynamite Entertainment

WORDS: **STEPHEN JEWELL**

Jonathan Lau's cover art for the first issue.

AFTER THE HUGE SUCCESS OF *Thundercats*, Dynamite Entertainment are continuing their Warner Bros animation line with *Space Ghost*, in a monthly title that shines new light on the cosmic crimefighter's mysterious roots.

"I love the energy and fun behind the original *Space Ghost* cartoon, but the show never had the time to dig into any backstory or continuity beyond the adventure at hand," says writer David Pepose, who describes the series as a different kind of origin story.

"Readers will learn early in our run as to why Space Ghost has begun his crusade to bring justice to the galaxy," he continues. "But our story ultimately focuses more on Space Ghost's first encounter with Jan and Jace, and how their dynamic evolves from them being rescued orphans to becoming trusted sidekicks in their own right.

"It's an origin that's more interested in looking forward than backward, as we're exploring how Space Ghost goes from being a lonely sentinel of the spaceways to bonding with his unorthodox family and reclaiming his long-lost humanity along the way."

While the original 1967 Hanna-Barbera animation was designed by legendary comic book artist Alex Toth, Pepose is impressed with how this series' artist Jonathan Lau has emphasised Space Ghost's spooky side. "Jonathan has really nailed the balance between the hard sci-fi of Space Ghost and the ghostly, ethereal design of the character, which helps make him stand out in a way that feels different from characters like Batman or Superman," he says.

"When we meet Space Ghost at the outset, he's very much leaned into presenting as this seemingly supernatural force of nature, which is an effective intimidation tactic when dealing with interstellar pirates and hijackers. But he's very much a flesh and blood hero, relying on his wits, his technology and his relentless pursuit of justice."

Having recently written *Punisher* and *Moon Knight: City Of The Dead* for Marvel, Pepose is emphasising Space Ghost's superheroic qualities. "I've always seen Space Ghost as sharing DNA with characters like Batman, Superman, Iron Man and even the Punisher, and mixing them all in a way that feels undeniably iconic and unique," he explains. "Space Ghost's wide-ranging power set really stood out to me as one of his defining elements, with the sci-fi technology of his Power Bands and Inviso-Belt.

"I put a lot of thought into those items and how they might work, and what their particular strengths and weaknesses might be. By adding additional context behind Space Ghost's vast abilities as a sci-fi superhero, we're able to really give him some concrete action sequences that pay off spectacularly in Jonathan's artwork.

"Readers can expect to see mainstays from the Council of Doom including Zorak, Brak, Metallus and more," he adds, "but also keep your eyes peeled for some deeper cuts that you might not expect."

Space Ghost issue one is out on 1 May.

SFX

SPACE AND TIME

NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF DOCTOR WHO

◆ Not one but two new trailers for season one of *Doctor Who* have been released. The first, on 22 March, racked up over 4 million views in just over a few days. The second, on 31 March, came with episode titles and further details.

◆ **Revealed as featuring in upcoming adventures are Golda Rosheuvel as Jocelyn in the season opener, Callie Cooke, Dame Siân Phillips and Tachia Newall, who will play Winston Chidozie in the series finale.**

◆ Also announced as guest stars are Alexander Devrient, Bhav Joshi, Majid Mehdizadeh-Valoujerdy and Caoilinn Springall.

◆ **Confirmed as directing an episode for 2025's season two is Ben A Williams.**

◆ Episode titles and directors for season one were announced on Easter Sunday. The first two episodes will be made available on BBC iPlayer at midnight on Friday 10 May (and streaming globally at the same time), with a BBC One evening screening on Saturday 11 May. Subsequent individual episodes will then follow this release pattern weekly.

1. "Space Babies" by Russell T Davies, directed by Julie Anne Robinson. (11 May)
2. "The Devil's Chord" by Russell T Davies, directed by Ben Chessell. (11 May)
3. "Boom" by Steven Moffat, directed by Julie Anne Robinson. (18 May)
4. "73 Yards" by Russell T Davies, directed by Dylan Holmes Williams. (25 May)
5. "Dot And Bubble" by Russell T Davies, directed by Dylan Holmes Williams. (1 June)
6. "Rogue" by Kate Herron and Briony Redman, directed by Ben Chessell. (8 June)
7. "The Legend Of Ruby Sunday" by Russell T Davies, directed by Jamie Donoughue. (15 June)
8. "Empire Of Death" by Russell T Davies, directed by Jamie Donoughue. (22 June)

When Steven Moffat was announced as returning to write the third episode, director Julie Anne Robinson said: "Steven Moffat gave me an intense challenge as a director. I asked him for a keyword to describe the overall tone of the episode. He said: 'Hitchcock'. I can't wait to see what everyone thinks. I'm grateful to Bad Wolf, the BBC and Disney+. It was an incredible experience".

◆ **New novels from BBC Books and Penguin have either been announced or have appeared on online retailer Kerblam – er, Amazon. *I, TARDIS: Memoirs Of An Impossible Box* by Steve Cole is released in July.**

◆ A three-book series called *Icons* is published on 24 October, in which the Doctor meets historical figures including Frida Kahlo, Shirley Jackson and Charles Darwin.

◆ ***The Adventures Before...* is a short story collection comprising preludes to a number of episodes, presented in a Target book format. Published on 3 October, it includes stories set before the events of "Arc Of Infinity", "Planet Of The Dead" and "The Day Of The Doctor".**

◆ There's another *Doctor Who* crossover with a classic novel in the form of *Doctor Who In Wonderland* by Paul Magrs, publishing on 25 July.

◆ **Three hardback novels for the new series are forthcoming, with two releasing in June and one in November.**

◆ *Fifteen Doctors 15 Stories*, including new adventures featuring the Fourteenth and Fifteenth incarnations, is published in paperback on 15 August.

◆ ***The Doctor Who Annual 2025* will be released on 5 September.**

◆ Over at Big Finish, *The Ninth Doctor Adventures: Star-Crossed* – starring Alex Kingston – and *Torchwood: Disco* release in May, *The War Doctor Rises* is due for release in August, while *Bernice Summerfield: The Eternity Club* releases from September.

◆ **Titan's new *Doctor Who* comic – *The Fifteenth Doctor* – is on sale from 26 June, with a variety of cover options. It follows a special Free Comic Book Day edition released on 4 May.**

Doctor Who is on BBC One and iPlayer (UK) and Disney+ (globally).

SCI-FACT! Kate Herron has previously directed episodes of *Loki* for Disney+ and *Sex Education* for Netflix.

SCI-FACT! **Played by Anthony Carrigan, Metamorpho will make his live-action debut in James Gunn's *Superman*.**

THE FINAL FRONTIER

RAMONA FRADON 1926-2024

Remembering a DC Comics great

WORDS: **NICK SETCHFIELD**

"DRAWING SUPERHEROES NEVER came easily to me," admitted comic book artist Ramona Fradon. "I didn't have the mythic sensibility and could never really take them seriously."

Gifted with a clean, whimsical style that gave grace and energy to such DC Comics icons as Aquaman, Batman and Wonder Woman, Fradon was raised in Westchester County, on the outskirts of New York City. Graduating from the Parsons School of Design, she was encouraged into comics by husband Dana Fradon, a *New Yorker* cartoonist. "He urged me to try my hand at cartooning and I found I could do it."

Fradon began working for DC Comics in the early 1950s, earning her first regular assignment on *Aquaman*, then a back-up strip in *Adventure Comics*. Her association with the character lasted a decade, defining the Silver Age incarnation of the maritime champion and introducing such enduring supporting characters as sidekick Aqualad.

In 1964 Fradon went on to co-create Metamorpho with writer Bob Haney, based on DC editor George Kashdan's idea for a shape-shifting crimefighter whose powers drew on the four elements. She soon found herself in sync with Haney.

"It was one of those wonderful collaborations that doesn't happen very often," she recalled. "His goofy stories gave me ideas about how the characters should look and act, and my goofy pictures gave him new ideas."

Fradon was a pioneer, one of only a few women drawing superheroes. Always "uncomfortable with male fantasies and the violent subject matter", she gravitated to lighter DC fare as *Super Friends* and *Plastic Man*, but also relished working on such supernatural titles as *House Of Mystery* and *House Of Secrets*.

After a 15 year run on newspaper strip *Brenda Starr*, Fradon officially retired in 1995 but returned for the occasional pro assignment and fan commission.

A HAIR-RAISING HALLOWEEN CHILLER!
THE SUPER FRIENDS BATTLE 5 FEARSOME FOES... AND THEIR MYSTERIOUS MASTER!
NO. 28 JAN.
THE SUPER FRIENDS
FRADON & SMITH

© 1980 DC COMICS

MICHAEL CULVER 1938-2024

British actor who played Imperial officer Captain Needa in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

AKIRA TORIYAMA 1955-2024

Japanese manga artist and designer, the creator of *Dr Slump* and *Dragon Ball*.

NEW AUTHOR

KALIANE BRADLEY

MEET THE EDITOR AND CRITIC BEHIND *THE MINISTRY OF TIME*

AITKEN ALEXANDER

Tell us about your protagonist.
→ Dashing, charming and slightly bemused Graham Gore is a Victorian polar explorer and Royal Navy commander brought from history to the near-future; the woman known as "the bridge" is the disaffected civil servant assigned to help him assimilate to the 21st century.

Did you have any specific inspiration?
→ I watched *The Terror* during a 2021 lockdown. It's about Sir John Franklin's doomed 1845 Arctic expedition. I became obsessed with polar exploration, and Commander Gore in particular. It grew out of wondering what it'd be like to meet him.

Is there any political theme?
→ A major one is living in the aftermath of an empire, and the ways Victorian values might relate to contemporary values. What would a Victorian think of multiculturalism? Feminism? E-scooters? (Spoiler: he hates e-scooters.)

How long did the book take to write?
→ The first draft took 11 weeks – I wrote it to amuse some friends, so it was easy and fun. Then I did a year of rewrites with my agent, and three more drafts with my editors.

Did you have to do much research?
→ I read so much about Victorian polar exploration. Sir Robert McClure's 1836 diaries were especially funny. Victorians believed you should treat frostbite and chilblains by rubbing skin with snow or ice; he describes a group of officers padding around barefoot on an iceberg like schoolboys!

The Ministry Of Time is out on 14 May, published by Sceptre.

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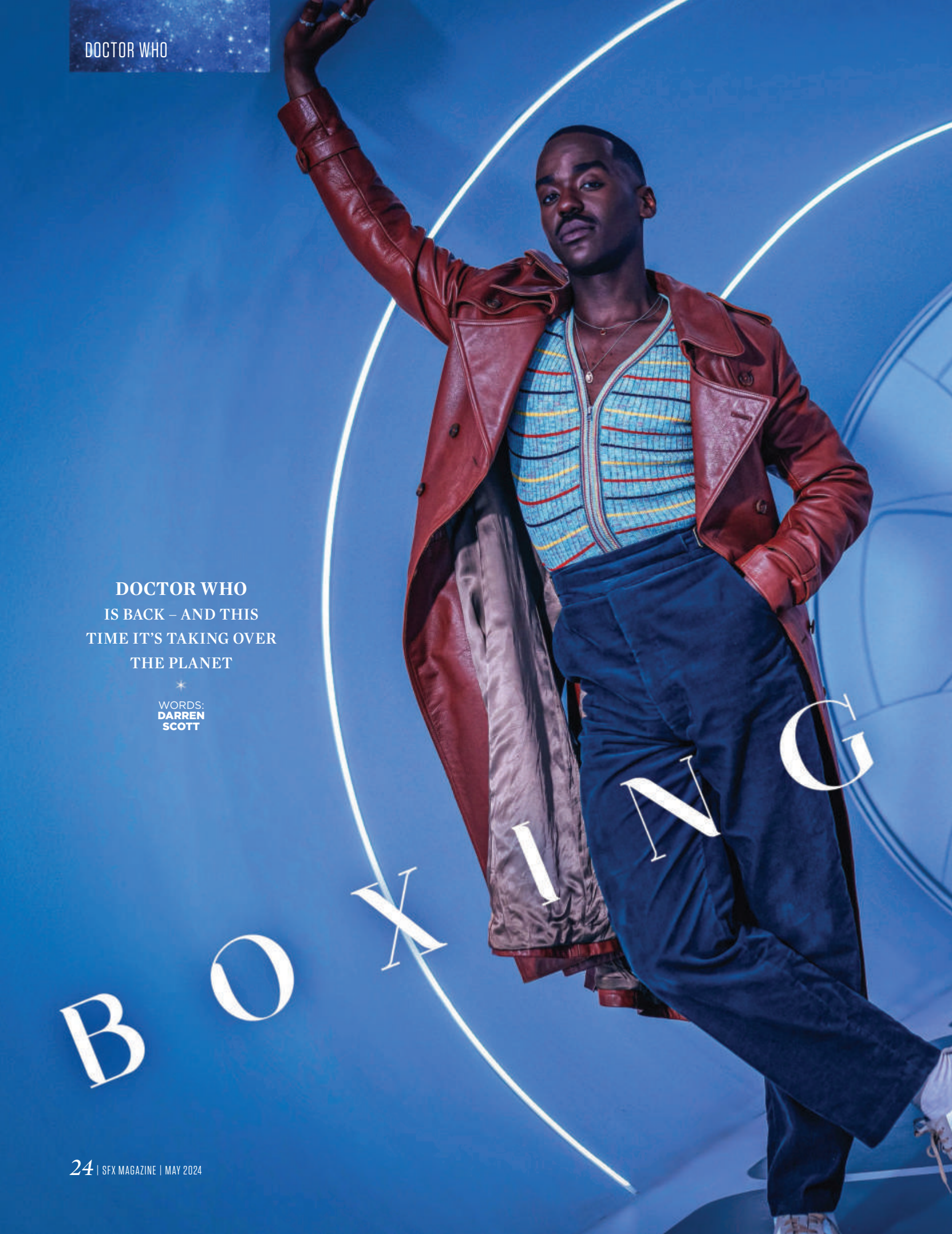


DOCTOR WHO
IS BACK – AND THIS TIME IT'S TAKING OVER THE PLANET

WORDS:
DARREN SCOTT

CLEVER

Filming on *Who* proper gets off to a good start.

THE GLOBAL LAUNCH OF *DOCTOR Who* has been rumbling along for quite some time. Today it's mid-March and *SFX* is in yet another fancy London hotel (no biscuits, tell the Mouse) to catch up with showrunner Russell T Davies and lead cast Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson. It's a busy week of international press for the team – something that's only going to get bigger in the build up to 11 May and simultaneous broadcast in nearly 250 countries at the same time. No pressure. An exciting new era awaits...

First of all, can we please put the tabloid rumours about Millie to bed?

RTD: Not leaving. Not at all. We were ordered for two years of a series off Disney, and we're delivering two years, and the Ruby Sunday story *literally* spans those two years. We are planning [to] shoot the [season two] finale in which Ruby has the most magnificent scenes, and Millie, it's some of your most challenging material yet, isn't it? It will all make sense once you see it play out. It's very unfortunate that these things make the papers. We're in a very difficult position, because you can't answer rumour, you can't speak to rumour, we can't try and pin it down because the internet will just run away and will either misinterpret or will decide that the Princess of Wales has been replaced by four cats in a wig.

So it's that you cannot begin to answer this sort of stuff. But you will see the love that we have for Millie and the extraordinary stories that Ruby's about to go on over the next two years. I guarantee you that.

That is a problem with shooting the second series while you're still doing the first series. All sorts of problems can happen that way that we saw coming, but what do we do? Stop shooting? No. We're making *such* a good show. I'm *burning* for people to see the story of Ruby Sunday. It's *amazing* and has so much mileage in it. And it's *still* burning. It's wonderful. I can't wait for you to see it.

Millie and Ncuti – you said you didn't think being Ruby and the Doctor would sink in until the Christmas episode went out. Did that happen?

MG: Yeah, definitely.

NG: Yeah! It feels good that it's out there. People have gotten a chance to get to know us a little bit. It definitely was like it calmed both of our nerves though. Like, "it works" and it looks amazing. But of course, obviously we had Russell's writing. So that was always going to be the case, but yeah, it calmed us down. It is slightly amping up again now with the series about to drop.

MG: That's how I feel. That's why it's weird to answer this question, because I already feel the same as when you last asked me!

RTD: Is the feeling coming back?

MG: Just the anticipation. We want to get to that level of the same love that the Christmas episode had. This series will get a lot of love, but yeah, it's almost pressure to fill the shoes of the Christmas one now!

RTD: You can never relax, can you? That was so successful. The fear is, how do we keep being successful for eight episodes in a row?

Russell T Davies has his close-up moment.

It is a worry, but the worry makes it good. I really believe that. That's why everyone, every designer, every runner on that set, every costumer, every wig maker works hard because they're worried about it being good.

MG: Exactly. *Exactly*.

Was there a moment on set where you thought, "Oh, *this* is where it first clicks"?

MG: Probably when I did the whole walk around the TARDIS thing. I've watched that TARDIS so much since I was a little girl. So I think just being the one going into it is a really surreal and important memory to have. It's such an iconic moment to do. Thank you for giving me that little scene.

NG: That was my best friend Patsy's favourite bit as well. She was like, "That's the bit where we're about to go into a new era." The way the camera goes onto your face, and your reaction.

MG: It's the music in the background I love as well. Mrs Flood going, [does impression] "Good luck, Ruby!"

NG: I guess the scene following directly after that, scene one of "Space Babies", where he's got the spiel about the Rani, Conquistador, he's talking about all the different Time Lords and he was like, *I'm* the Doctor. It was the first time I said it [claps hands] *properly*.

RTD: Gallifrey! That's the first time you say Gallifrey...

NG: Gallifrey and explaining my backstory was like, of what? Oh, this character that I'm playing, which is? The Doctor...

Let's tease season one! Starting with "Space Babies".

MG: We pick up where we left off in the Christmas episode where Ruby is entering the TARDIS for the first time and she's going "Who are you?" It's that iconic companion meeting the Doctor properly, because we didn't really meet in the Christmas episode. So it was really nice to have that moment and that click, and it's kind of Ruby's test to see if she's really worthy of that role, to travel with the Doctor.

NG: And also she *wants* to.

MG: She's just dying for adventure and dying to believe in it because she's just in awe. It's a fun episode. It's fun. "Give me a year" – just to be so random about it. I love it.

NG: The Doctor and companion's first *proper* adventure, that they've chosen to go on together. They land on a spaceship [occupied] by babies in space where all the adults have gone and they need to get down to the bottom of that. And in the meantime, there's a hungry foe... We face the Bogeyman!

MG: We didn't know what the Bogeyman was gonna look like. Remember when we were

"There's a running story that's going to build to The Most Devastating Finale"

Googling it? Going, "What does it look like?" and we saw this cosy cute bear? Then the prop designer showed it to us and we were like, "Oh, good god!"

NG: *Terrifying*!

MG: No wonder the babies are scared of that. That was a really fun monster for sure. Robert Strange as that monster was incredible.

RTD: It's also worth saying, actually, that at the beginning, the story of Ruby's birth continues. That's a spine throughout the series – we saw at Christmas she was a foundling, left at the church at Ruby Road. Also the Doctor's now a foundling, mysteriously abandoned in outer space, doesn't know his parents either, and that's a big connection between the two of them, it's a real hum, a vibration between the two of them that really forges their friendship like no other Doctor and companion team ever before, and that hasn't finished.

You're going to see that develop. Every episode stands on its own. But you want to see a running theme and a running story that's going to build and build and build to The Most Devastating Finale. Literally, the biggest finale *ever*. There's some shots of that in the trailers coming up. Oh my god, you're gonna die. →

Ncuti Gatwa and Millie Gibson aren't impressed.

PICTURES: JAMES PARDON, RAY BURNISTON © BBC STUDIOS

Ruby Sunday (Millie Gibson) slinks it up in '60s gear.

"The Devil's Chord".

RTD: Episode two, Jinkx Monsoon [drag star Hera Hoffer]! Open the door: Jinkx Monsoon. Welcome, hurray!

MG: I love Jinkx. That episode is for Jinkx. There's so many outstanding scenes where me and Ncuti were like, "Shall we just go home?"

NG: [Growls] She's *so good!*

MG: She was insane.

NG: Such a delicious villain.

RTD: A *huge* villain.

NG: *HUGE* villain.

RTD: The like of which we've never seen before. Off the scale.

You almost forget the Beatles are in it, which is iconic!

RTD: Yeah, I know what you mean. The Beatles were an important part of it, and that was fun casting them. I mean, the chance to cast Paul and John and Ringo and George was amazing, and they're a lovely bunch of lads.

MG: When I was younger, my favourite episodes were when the Doctor and companion went back in time because I'm always like, "Oh, what's the companion gonna wear?" or "Who are they going to talk to in this era?" What are Ruby and the Doctor going to be like with the Beatles? Can you imagine two best friends going to chat to the Beatles back in the day? You'd be like [screams]. Fangirling!

RTD: And it *visually* shows what we're doing. Pam Downe on costume and Claire Williams on make-up. You've seen the photos of these two in the 1960s. What an image, what *extraordinary* work. That says a lot about our intent. Big, bold. We're not sneaking into the 1960's, we are *arriving*, big time. It's gorgeous.

When you look at doing tie-ins for BBC shows around release, have you considered a *RuPaul's Drag Race* one?

MG: [Gasps] Oh Russell, you *have* to do that!

RTD: Imagine! Well not me, you two can do it!

MG: Well *I'll* do that any day!

RTD: What was I doing? Dragging up? Can you imagine! RuT! [Roars laughing]

MG: I would love to do that. [To Ncuti] You've got to do it!

RTD: You must've been asked to be a judge on it, surely?

NG: I've been asked a couple of times...

MG: Why didn't you do it?!

NG: Because I've not watched it yet! I've never seen an episode yet. I know, I know... Everyone keeps getting on at me about it.

MG: Just watch Jinkx's – trust me, that's the best season.

RTD: Do you just not fancy it? I resisted it for a long time, actually, and now I love it.

NG: It's not that I'm resisting, I just don't have time. [Laughs] Where is my time?

> **"Can you imagine two best friends going to chat to the Beatles back in the day?"**

Not sure this lot will ever amount to anything.

Jinkx Monsoon being as dramatic as ever.

MG: Every single thing I've recommended to Ncuti he doesn't watch. [Laughs] I made a list of things and he doesn't watch them. He's just a busy, busy man.

Had you not seen Jinkx doing stuff on *Drag Race*?

NG: No, never.
MG: I showed him her best moments and we were in stitches.
NG: What I do know is the creativity on that show, and the performance element of what they do, is just *insane*. I thought, just what incredible casting.
MG: So clever.
NG: Such a master of her craft.
RTD: And who else could have played that?
MG: No one.
RTD: It's an extraordinary thing to look at that and go, "Who else would we have got?" Who else would we have gone to? Jinkx is the drag queen of drag queens. She's the winner of the super final.
MG: Yeah, she won her season and then she won *All Stars*. No drag queen's done that.
RTD: That's the Olympic gold of drag queens. But then the imagination... The professionalism she brought with her was gobsmacking.
MG: She came *prepared*. In that page turn [script read-through], me and Ncuti were like [drops jaw].
NG: I know!

Are you going to try and top the iTunes chart again?

RTD: Yes, there is music in there. That would be nice – we haven't got the old goblin singer but we've got you two singing! That's exciting. It's lovely. It's hard to talk about it, it's a very musical episode. We should be top of every chart, *SFX*.

Episode three, "Boom".

RTD: Written by Steven Moffat. The Doctor and Ruby open the TARDIS doors onto the surface of a war-torn world. Ruby's first alien planet and from that point on, it's excitement and that's all I'm saying. Amazing episode and again, a fantastic character study for these two.

The director has a *lot* of praise for you in this episode!

NG: Oh my gosh.
MG: That episode made us feel like we were in theatre, because we filmed it in chronological order. So all the lines felt like we were in a theatre performance. We were doing seven-minute takes and stuff like that. By the end of it, we're like, "Oh my god, again?"
RTD: Clever director though, clever.
MG: It was really cool. It just adds to the whole intensity of it for sure.
RTD: It's tough.
MG: In-between that we were flipping between "Space Babies". [Laughs]
NG: We were doing two [episodes] at the same time so it was a bit mad. We went from the most *intense* to "Space Babies" [laughs]. Gosh, mad.
RTD: Steven Moffat at his best. Of course I asked him back, one of my first phone calls was to say "Please come and write an episode" and god it's good. →

The Doctor in a *Back To The Future* moment.

The Doctor has a good old-fashioned British lunch.

The Doctor and Ruby live it up, Regency style.

Episode four, "73 Yards".
RTD: Episode four, I would say, is the episode most unlike any episode of *Doctor Who* ever before, and unlike any other piece of television. The TARDIS lands on the Welsh Coast and then you're kind of stepping into Welsh folk horror, not a phrase I expected to be using.

There are secrets. There's legend, there's rumours, there's mysteries. There's a huge mystery for Ruby to solve. We go to very unexpected places, and that's all I'm saying.

What's it like when you get a script like that?
MG: That was the first script I read. I remember it was on the way home from my first visit in Cardiff and I'd had my first fitting there, and then on the way home Vicki Delow, the producer, was like, "Oh, by the way, here's your first script".

I was like, "Oh my god, really? Written by Russell T Davies, oh my god." So that kept me occupied for the three-hour journey back home. But yeah, I was gobsmacked. As soon as I finished it, I read it again.
RTD: You sent me the loveliest text.
MG: I texted you straight away. I was like, that is some episode! It's a really cool episode.
RTD: Mad.
MG: Great ending.
RTD: Dame Siân Phillips is in that one. We can say that, it'll be out by then. Ninety years old and an astonishing woman. It's amazing she hasn't been in *Doctor Who* before. What an honour to be in a read-through with her, it was amazing. Scary!

What was the episode like for you, Ncuti?
NG: Umm, it was... Cold! [Laughs] It *was* cold.
MG: That was our first scene!
NG: It was our fi... [Looks quizzically] No?
MG: We filmed our first scene in that episode!
RTD: I thought that was the barrage... Was it not the barrage?
MG: Oh, sorry, I've wiped the barrage out of my head [Laughs]
NG: Yeah, it was the barrage! Second, then? One of.
MG: First leaving the TARDIS scene, going "Where are we?" So that was our first experience doing that.
NG: It was amazing. Got to see Millie *shine*, and it was a delight.

What's the barrage?
RTD: Oh! Well, let's move on to episode five...

Episode five, "Dot And Bubble".
RTD: There's a barrage in Cardiff down by the bay. That made a very good location for *Doctor Who*. That's all. That's quite spoilery but its existence is fine. Also very nice and enclosed where no one could find us filming, that was a nice secret shoot.

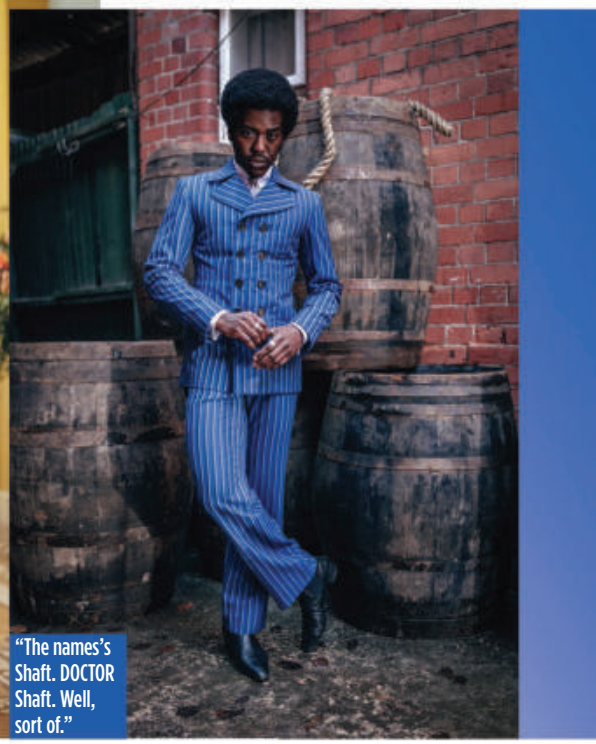
How would you sum up episode five?
MG: I feel like that's quite... can I say it's quite [puts hand over face and mouths to Russell].
RTD: I'm rubbish at this! Don't ask me to lip read again! [Laughs]
MG: I think that's quite *Black Mirror*, that one.
RTD: Yes. It's an alien planet. It's a colony. [Millie and Ncuti roll their eyes and laugh]
MG: He just tells everything! We're trying to keep it vague!
RTD: There's trailers going out this week, you'll see alien colonies! So a very *Black Mirror*-y story with a lot to say about our world, and on this world, it's running out of control. Good stuff. Callie Cook is the leader. She's absolutely wonderful. She's phenomenal, a phenomenal guest star and is stunning in this episode. It's a difficult one – this episode there'll be more to say about afterwards than any other. Possibly.

Episode six, "Rogue".
RTD: Travel with us, *SFX*, to 1813. [Millie squeals and claps] The *Bridgerton* episode, let's just say it.
MG: We had to learn the waltz!
NG: The waltz *and* the fandango.
MG: You had to learn the...
NG: I had to learn the tango!

Getting to do period stuff twice, with wigs and costume, what's that been like?
MG: Oh my god. *Bridgerton* I had the most fun filming. I just was floating around in my princess dress like I was the queen or something. I was just taking myself off – we were filming in the most beautiful manors. We filmed in three different manors. It was like when I used to play dress-up when I was younger. I was like, "This is the real thing and I've got my own castle" [Ncuti laughs hard].

Ncuti wasn't there, because we didn't have that many scenes, so I'm just roaming around... [Ncuti in hysterics]. I actually have a video of me next to this waterfall and Jack the runner was trying to find me, because I just wandered off and was taking pictures like I was Snow White in the forest or something. I was *loving* it [both Russell and Ncuti are in hysterics]. It was great. All the runners were like, "Has anyone seen Millie?"
RTD: She's just walked into the forest!
NG: [Laughing] I've got my own castle! That one was so much fun for me. I had all my

Episode three, "Boom", by Steven Moffat. Yes!



"The names's Shaft. DOCTOR Shaft. Well, sort of."

scenes with Jonathan [Groff] and what a wonderful energy to sweep through our show and a wonderful voice as well. It stands out. He's such a deep actor.
MG: [Brandishing phone] Sorry, that's it... [Shows photo of her in full costume, in sunglasses, by a fountain surrounded by greenery] I'm in my own fairy tale...
RTD: Can we have the cover of *SFX* with that? [Millie and Ncuti are falling about laughing]
MG: I was throwing pebbles... This is what I was doing when you were working with Jonathan.

You were doing night shoots and Ncuti was at Beyoncé with Jonathan...
[Ncuti howls with laughter] **MG:** How the other half live. I was covering for Ncuti so he could live his Beyoncé dream.
NG: Jonathan took me to Beyoncé, yes. [Laughs] That was amazing. He had that in his contract [Bursts out laughing again] Incredible. *Incredible*.

What was it like working with Indira Varma?
NG: Exceptional. She's HIL-arious.
MG: So funny. I could talk to that woman for hours and just be entranced by her. But her level of quick wit and improvisation in the scenes that we were doing... I think I'm quick but I was talking to Indira and I was like, "I can't keep up with this woman!" Oh my god, the humour, she's just hilarious. I had so much fun.

> **"I just literally hope we can get from here to transmission without things being spoiled"**

NG: You could see her just eating that role up. It was like, this is just *so* much fun [laughs]. You are *fun*.
RTD: A good old-fashioned *Doctor Who* villain.
NG: [Laughing] She's the sort of actor that can make the ridiculous *sublime*. She's just exceptional. What a skill.
MG: She committed to it, so skilled.
RTD: I've got to say, also, about these two, that they work so hard. One day you're flying on wires, the next day you're running away from a monster – in amongst all that, in amongst the busiest schedule in the world, they had to learn all that choreography. It's a proper *Bridgerton* episode with dances and waltzes. That's a *lot* of work and you must have packed that into your spare time on your Saturdays. You worked *so* hard.
MG: Can I say about...
RTD: The psychic earrings? Yes.
MG: I said to Ncuti, it's fine, because we're not from this era, it doesn't have to be accurate we'll be fine not being *amazing* at the waltz, and he went, "No, we have psychic earrings that we can switch so we can do whatever we need in the best way."
NG: Like, literally we have to be *perfect*. [Laughs]
RTD: The psychic earrings beam the choreography into your head, that's scene one. So let go of that dream!
MG: I'd better get learning!

Episodes seven and eight, "The Legend Of Ruby Sunday" and "Empire Of Death".
RTD: That's a two-parter, it's a great big series finale. You will have seen this, it's back to Earth, back to UNIT HQ, that great big tower in the middle of London. Kate's back, played by Jemma Redgrave, Bonnie Langford's back, hurray, hurray, hurray. Lenny Rush is in it as Morris, the scientific advisor at UNIT, who was delightful. Alexander Devrient as Colonel Ibrahim is back.

So that's just the start again, that's scene one, back to the ops room at UNIT, and a huge finale, a *huge* finale, all the threads that have been drawn throughout the series coming together. Explosive reveals. I just hope we can get from here to transmission without things being spoiled, because things do get spoiled. And things get spoiled to an extraordinary degree. We found one script – I'm going to say this – we found one script on an open server in Brazil. It's nuts. That's what happens.
NG: [Looking ill] I was going to say, oh my god – I was in Brazil.
RTD: It wasn't you! [Laughs] If you can reach this finale without spoilers, it's stunning. Things we discover about you [looks at Millie] and about you [looks at Ncuti] and about the Doctor and Ruby, it's life changing. Honestly, you will have the *best* time if you watch this finale unspoiled, it's shocking. So please do that, honestly.

Doctor Who is on BBC One and iPlayer (UK) and Disney+ (globally) from 11 May.

BABY

DIRECTOR
JULIE ANNE ROBINSON
ON HER TWO
DOCTOR WHO
EPISODES

WORDS:
DARREN SCOTT

Tell us about "Space Babies".

The TARDIS lands on a spaceship. It was very, very hard to shoot. We used real babies! I like to do things that I've never done before and sometimes that's quite hard, with such a long career as mine. So I was very happy to be doing science fiction and working with Russell, and with babies who were high on the call sheet. I think some were about one-and-a-half years old.

Is there a CG element to the babies?

Yes, there's a slight CG element to it. But that happened after I left. It was all worked out by fantastic people who took on the very tricky job of figuring out how to make the babies actually talk. So I had to just point the camera at the babies.

What was the most "out there" moment of filming for you?

Just literally shooting the babies in the spaceship. It was a real puzzler. In America, when I work, I get less time to figure stuff out, but in the UK we were given enough time to really, *really* think about it properly. But nothing prepares you for being on set with 12 real babies all acting differently.

Which there was no avoiding really – there was no way of getting around that. So that was the most challenging. What you did when one started crying and you thought, "Right, get his mum in... That's our lead. He's crying. We can't have them crying!" All skills that you rely on as a director working with actors normally just didn't apply. So it was hard.

Let's talk about "Boom".

That was also challenging in its own way. That was a huge acting challenge for Ncuti, who I think is one of the finest actors of his →

Director Julie Anne Robinson on set.

BOOM

generation. I think he's absolutely extraordinary. The emotional journey that he had to go on throughout the episode was extraordinary really. The babies were harder! Because at least I could work with Ncuti and we could navigate it together. He's such a brilliant actor. He really, really is. It had to be very, very specific and carefully choreographed.

What was your journey to *Doctor Who*?

◆ I wanted to work with Russell. My friend Julie Gardner was the one that contacted me about the episodes. I just knew instantly that I wanted to do it, and that it was going to be a landmark thing in my career. I had been approached previously about doing *Doctor Who*, and in fact, I was partially responsible for getting David Tennant the role of *Doctor Who* back in the day.

I feel great pride about that, because he was in something that I directed called *Blackpool*. It was his first really big role. I went to Julie and I said, "David's fantastic in this thing, and he loves *Doctor Who*." So in my own small way, I feel like I contributed.

But time moves on and I thought, "Now's the time, I've got to go and do it. I've just got to". I can't speak highly enough for the team that I was working with. The executive producer Phil Collinson, I absolutely love. He's just a great man really. And Joel Collins as exec prod, great to work with. Russell was just everything that I hoped he would be.

What's it like working with Millie and Ncuti?

◆ They're both very talented actors. *Very* talented. That's always half the battle really: when you point the camera at somebody and they just light up the screen. Ncuti is very interesting. I think he could play almost anything. I think he could play James Bond if he wanted to. He's very handsome and that helps. But underneath that there's just this raw acting. He's got the real stuff as an actor, he really does. He sort of channels, in a way. And Millie was just this effervescent presence that bounced off him so brilliantly.

They have such great on-screen chemistry.

◆ Yes. And they do seem to be that way off-screen as well. So that was really nice to see. Millie's just got a very, very kind of natural quality on screen. Which is rare, and she's so young.

What's it like filming on the new TARDIS set?

◆ The DP I was working with, Tobias Datum, had some very interesting ideas about how we could use that set. Planning it, we wanted to use the LED lights in the walls in a way that was specific to us. So that was cool. I did something in "Space Babies" – I talked to Russell about it and I said, "Russell, look, I just think they should physically take off, that Ncuti and Millie should physically take off, when the TARDIS takes off." He said, "Oh darling, I love that. I love that." So we did. That was an innovation as well. But it's epic. It's an epic set. Phil Sims, who's the production designer, is absolutely a delightful human being and so talented. Great team there.

When you say they physically take off, do they jump up?

◆ No, no, no, you have to put wires in the set. So you have to remove part of the top

The Doctor (Ncuti Gatwa) with Ruby (Millie Gibson).

Golda Rosheuvel as Jocelyn in "Space Babies".

A space not-quite-baby in episode three.

Something nasty this way comes... as usual.

of the TARDIS, get wires and then you have them on a pulley system in harnesses. You have to have their clothes built so that you don't see the harness and then you pull them and they float. Then you have to paint the wires out afterwards.

How did you bring the Bogeyman to life?

◆ You have to remember that when you read the script, it's nothing. It doesn't exist. It could take any form. It could be in CG, it could be a real man in a rubber suit. Then you go through months of conversations about what this is going to look like. So it takes shape, and it blooms. I didn't talk about anything as much as I talked about that, what that was going to look like, and it goes through approval after approval. Everybody involved has to all be on the same page about what this is going to look like, and it evolves. Then you do camera tests with the suit, and with the shape of the suit, and you see what works best in different lighting conditions, and how to light the suit. Then you go through other iterations and you say, "Well, this isn't working about the suit," and you change it again.

So that's how that happens. It's not like you're presented with the suit, you shape the suit. It was really worth it. I phoned around a lot of my friends who are monster experts, and they advised me as well. They said goo really helps. So we have a lot of goo! But I'm really proud of it. Because I would say to Joel, "Please, I just can't have another conversation about this. I cannot." But, and this is what's great about Joel, he'd say, "Yes, but it's going to make it better. So it's going to be worth it." He's sort of relentless in his pursuit of perfection.

It's a wonderful quality to have somebody like that, you're just so tired of him. Because you can't believe that you're gonna have to, but you know that he's right, ultimately, and he was the same about the babies, he was the same about all of the technical aspects of the Painting Practice element. I had never done deep sci-fi before. I had not worked in such an intense way.

With holograms, for example, which most sci-fi directors will just take in their stride, and monsters, but I have never done any of that before. So it was a real education. But my episodes in particular, I do feel like I achieved something that I'm very proud of. I've had a long career, but this is going to be a very memorable moment in it.

> **"I was partially responsible for getting David Tennant the role of Doctor Who"**

Do you have a better working relationship with goo now?

◆ I do! I love and now understand the importance of goo. Mind you, I'll tell you something, it is very slippery. Which we didn't realise. The poor Bogeyman... I have so many great behind the scenes pictures of him, Robert Strange, he was a great guy. He'd done *Game Of Thrones* and he was a monster specialist. There's a scene that I filmed with him where he was behind the scenes eating a banana. He was just putting on this funny voice and going, "Well, I don't know why everybody's running away from me all the time." It's so funny.

There was a lot of laughter. We did laugh a lot on set. When Millie was doing the bit in "Space Babies" when she discovered the slime. She played that so beautifully that I was *laughing* because she played it pitch perfectly. I won't give it away, but her performance was so spot on in terms of restraint, and she'd obviously really given it some thought. Me and Ncuti were just killing ourselves laughing, it was so funny.

Would you be up for a return to *Who*?

◆ Yes, definitely. Definitely. In fact, they wanted me to come back and do another one now, but I couldn't because I was busy over here in this country [the US], but I'd love to go back. I'd do anything with Russell, I tell you!

Ncuti's Gallifreyan fingernail "tattoos".

The Doctor and Ruby (Millie Gibson) rock the '60s.

SERVING FACE

HAIR AND MAKE-UP DESIGNER CLAIRE WILLIAMS ON NEW LOOKS

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

Tell us about the look for Ncuti's Doctor.

◆ I had worked with Ncuti before – I did season one of *Sex Education*. So he was a known quantity, we're good friends. As well as giving us a little bit of scope to be a bit more adventurous and playful in a way that's suited to his personality, I wanted to do something a little bit more interesting. So we started looking at nail tattoos. Then I was looking at some of the symbols in the Gallifreyan alphabet.

Obviously, they're too big to fit on a fingernail, because they're quite elaborate and quite large. So we just took elements and adapted them and shrunk them to size. We just put them on like a normal tattoo. They're water transfer tattoos and then we seal them with a matte nail varnish.

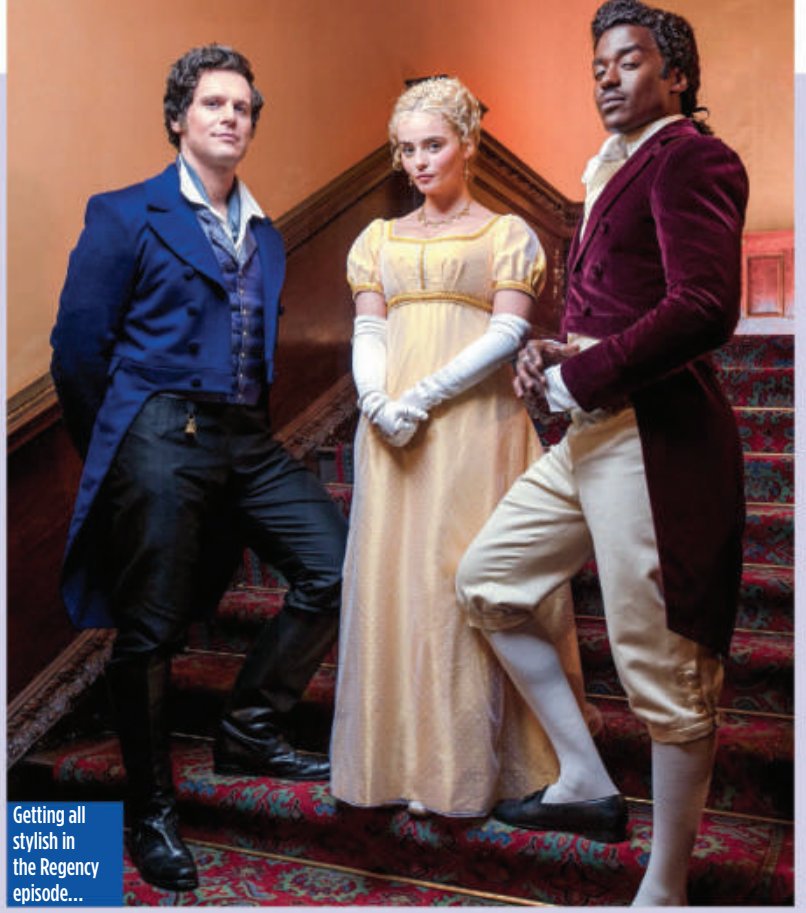
I always remember when we were doing *Sex Ed* that Ncuti said he wanted to be bleach blond. I said, "We'll do it one day" and of course, *Barbie* beat me to it. So I just thought, "Well, what about a really, really, *really* dark blue, like the colour of the night sky?" It was like the colour of the galaxy, if you like, a midnight blue. Sometimes it picks up, it depends on the lighting or the scene that we're shooting, and sometimes you can't tell, it has to be lit for it to show.

That's kind of what we wanted. It was like this mercurial, is it blue? Isn't it blue? Has he got something on his nails? Hasn't he? Are the symbols changing? It was a look that would evolve in the different lights and sets and sometimes it would be more apparent, and sometimes it would disappear. It was like magic. That's what Ncuti brought to the character really, this sort of impish, mercurial, Puck-like magic.

He was in a wig for the Regency [episode]. We had to have a wig made for him as his hair was just too short. I then just styled in a Regency style. We made some neat little sideburns. We had two sets of sideburns – one for the '60s one, one for the Regency.

What about Millie's character?

◆ She came to us from *Coronation Street*, with long bleached blonde hair, but it was more of a



Getting all stylish in the Regency episode...

...and just hanging out in their everyday casuals.

Jinkx Monsoon gets her own distinctive look.

golden blonde. It was long and we obviously wanted her to look different, we wanted to make Ruby different. So the option was to go either darker and shorter, or even lighter. We decided she's quite gutsy, that character.

When we first got the scripts, you could sense her confidence and her self-belief and her self-assurance. Ultimately we took her to a platinum blonde, we cut it short, and it worked brilliantly. I just love that hair. I think it's just hair with attitude. It's cool and it's contemporary and actually, it was really adaptable for us because we had to do a '60s do with it and also our Regency look as well. So we were able to add hairpieces onto the front of her own hair and turn it into a beehive, and then a beautiful Regency do with little ringlets and it just worked brilliantly. She just loved it.

Did Jinkx Monsoon do her own hair and make-up?

◆ No, absolutely not. That wasn't the case at all. She's an amazing person for a start. Very, very collaborative. Jinkx was very keen that she wasn't going to appear as Jinkx, she was aware that this was a character that's not Jinkx. We had a chat about who this character was, and how we were going to make that work for Jinkx. It was definitely a collaboration between the two of us.

She wanted an allusion to Jinkx, and that was the orange hair. So we decided we would keep the red hair because that is a Jinkx trademark. But in terms of styling, make-up, costume, Jinkx was really happy to look at my designs and Pam Downe's designs for costumes and hair and make-up, and she basically didn't veto anything, she was just onboard. It's quite a process that you have to go through. We have many, many meetings and many, many mood boards and designs, and it was just finessed and whittled down until we got the three looks that her character offers in that episode.

How did Jinkx feel about the look?

◆ Fantastic. Jinkx is a superb performer, and really professional, really elegant, really dedicated. She's a brilliant villain. But I do think, without sort of blowing our own trumpet, that once you put on that wig, the make-up... we made bespoke fingernails, Pam made these incredible costumes. When she put that on, she would transform. She just became the character. Obviously we had a lot of help.

The designs are uniquely mine. I bought the wigs from Wig Chapel, who supply Jinkx's drag wigs. I then had them re-fronted by a local wig maker who made the hairline a little bit more realistic, but they weren't real-hair wigs, they were acrylic. I cut them very short, set them on rollers and styled them and that's what Jinkx wore.

Then we had brilliant make-up, wig and hair artists to come and stand by and make sure they were maintained and looked after throughout the day. But it was a long make-up – she was in the make-up room for two and a half hours every day.

Which was your favourite to do?

◆ The whole Regency episode, I loved doing that. That was fantastic, because it's period hair and make-up and elegant and beautiful. We had a super-amazing crowd supervisor who had fabulous crowd looks. Everyone looked immaculate. We have beautiful hairpieces, beautiful flowers, jewellery, clothes. I just loved that. That was a key one for me.

Ben Chessell in the present day, for a change.

TICK T

DIRECTOR **BEN CHESSELL** TAKES THE TARDIS BACK IN TIME IN HIS TWO EPISODES

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

What can you tease about the episodes?

I got sent scripts and I read them and went, "These are crazy. These are wonderful, ambitious, in some ways quite nutty scripts." Episode two is madcap and bold and unexpected, and loony in a really sharp and interesting way. We'll have sequences that you've never seen in a *Doctor Who* episode before. Episode six is a more classic *Doctor Who* episode, but it's romantic and funny and frightening.

Is filming in real world situations complicated?

Recreating '60s London is tricky. Most of the location shooting is done in Cardiff – it really wouldn't have been helpful to shoot in London anyway, because London doesn't look like that any more. So we found streets that gave us some features – you can get streets that'll give you maybe six good buildings and then you have to use visual effects to remove the buildings that wouldn't have been there, and you can bring in foreground elements.

So there's a scene where the Doctor and Ruby leave the TARDIS and cross the road on the way to Abbey Road Studios, and there's a shot that looks right down the road. We picked that particular intersection because in the foreground, a lot of those buildings were genuine '60s buildings.

Then we bring in some cars and then the rest of it is something that we build in post production: the deep background, because obviously the London skyline is wrong, and you have to do some replacement and some building. So you try to get as much real world as you can, and then use digital effects and matte paintings to fill in the gaps.

ET O RIDE

The Doctor and Ruby visit the swinging '60s.

Ncuti Gatwa with Jonathan Groff in "Rogue".

Jinkx Monsoon gives it the full pantomime villain.

With music being a focus, do you have to work further ahead?

◆ Absolutely. Murray Gold, the composer, and I worked quite extensively in pre-production. I worked with him much more than I would normally work with a composer in pre-production to produce temp versions of the music. Without saying too much, I can say there are sections in which various actors have to perform pieces of music, and they had to learn some of that music to the rough versions of tracks that we had developed so that their playing would be convincing.

They didn't actually have to be accomplished instrumentalists, but their movements and their actions needed to be synchronised to the music. So we had to do a lot of preparing cue tracks that we could then use on the set on the day to achieve those sequences.

What was it like working with Jinkx?

◆ Jinkx Monsoon was one of the most professional people I've ever worked with. She was just like a real old-fashioned showbiz professional, just really fun and really relaxed. But then when someone called action, she hit her mark. She had a lot of showbiz razzle dazzle and she brought an American Broadway professionalism to the set that I hadn't ever quite experienced exactly like that before.

I really loved working with Jinkx, she was quite surprising. I turned up to set with a very open mind as to maybe she would be unfamiliar with working on a drama, and that was all nonsense. She was absolutely a sharp Broadway professional.

What kind of character does Jinkx play?

◆ I think we're allowed to say that she is going to be one of the most challenging enemies that the Doctor has ever faced. There's a fantastic sequence early in the episode where she has arrived and the Doctor has realised what he's up against, and we were very excited to get the chance to really show the Doctor scared.

What's it like working with Millie Gibson and Ncuti Gatwa?

◆ They had already been working together a little bit by the time I started working with them, but not that much. They were still finding their way of working together. So it was interesting for me to step into this quite fresh situation on set. They love each other very much. Let me talk about them individually.

Ncuti is extraordinary. He's got incredible charisma. He's got an incredible presence. He's going to be as big a star as it's possible to be, I think he's just going to be huge. He's beautiful and poised and highly skilled.

Ncuti doesn't need a lot of direction. He likes to talk about things. He likes to get feedback. My job is to be the one person who's absolutely watching everything that he does from a storytelling point of view.

So we would talk on that kind of level. He would ask, "Should I try this, should I try that, did that work?" So we had time to try things and Ncuti likes to have that space to play around and try different options, which is obviously great for an editor. Millie has superb comic timing – really, she's a natural. She's very instinctive – she's got great chops and great comic timing and she's really skilled at letting her own infectious personality come to the surface of the scene.

What was Jonathan Groff like?

◆ As a director, I work with lots of famous actors, and a lot of my friends are actors. I don't really get starstruck, but I was slightly starstruck by Jonathan Groff. He's worked with David Fincher. God, I'm directing someone who's directed by Fincher. All the time he's got to be standing there thinking, "This guy's not as good as Fincher."

But he was so sweet and so delightful. Again, you don't know what to expect. You try to go in with an open mind, but there are some American actors who stand on ceremony and expect a certain kind of formality on a set, and Jonathan couldn't have been less like that.

What about Indira Varma?

◆ Indira I have always loved as an actor. I was so pleased that she said yes to do that, that was really fun. I told her that I've always loved her. We wrapped one morning at 5am and the sun was coming up and it was dawn. Basically, the last scene was just her, me and the crew at dawn. For her to have kept a good nature and still being cracking jokes and having a good time at 5am, I thought, "You're a good person."

What are their characters like?

◆ Jonathan plays a mysterious character. Indira, however, plays a villain. A terrifying villain. Which she loved, by the way. She loved really digging deep into her acting chops to play a big villain.

"Rogue" has a big ballroom scene...

◆ There's a lot that takes place in that Regency ballroom, that was a fantastic set. The art department put a massive amount of time and resources into building it. The building's a genuine orangery, but they did a huge amount to build it back and make it a proper period Regency ballroom. They painted this beautiful mural and made a huge chandelier and then we filled it with 60 or 70 dancers in period costumes. It was quite a thing shooting that set.

What's it like filming on the TARDIS?

◆ It's very big, so the main section where you stand at the console is quite a long way off the ground. The director of photography Jamie Cairney – who was excellent by the way, he's such a skilful practitioner and a lovely guy – we stood on that set quite a lot. It was quite new. We weren't the first to come on it, but we were one of the first. They put a lot of work into how the lighting worked.

But we spent a lot of time standing there, him and I, in a big empty studio talking about how to get the best out of that set. Because you don't want to waste those great [opportunities]. Actually the fact that it's high off the ground, there's a sequence in episode two where one of the characters almost falls in that set. We designed that stunt to make the most of what a great set it is.

We built a platform opposite that set and put a big technocrane on that, because it felt like it gave us the most flexibility to put the camera wherever we wanted, without having a huge crew tromping all over the set and getting in the way of the actors. It's big, but also the walkways are quite narrow and you don't want to have seven crew up there with microphones and cameras and stuff. So we really mapped it out the way to get the most out of what an excellent set it is.

> **"Ncuti is extraordinary. He's got incredible charisma. He's got an incredible presence"**

Were there any complicated or ambitious parts of your episodes?

◆ Episode two has some incredibly complicated sequences in it. Sequences that involved – all in the one shot sometimes – music, characters pretending to play music, stunts, practical effects, puppetry, visual effects. Big moving shots, all happening all at once.

There's a sequence in the show, an epic climactic sequence conflict/battle of episode two, that we took five days to shoot, which I've never really had that kind of level of time on a TV show to shoot one sequence. But that said, I've never shot a sequence quite that complicated – in a *very* big set that we built. We built a massive set. We built a set to be studio one at Abbey Road, and it's a very, very big room.

Then episode six was more about finding the right locations for the period, to create the period setting. We had a number of different locations. So it all takes place in one stately home in 1813, but we shot it over three different locations and some sets that we built back at the studio.

So we had to map out the geography of our heads and work it out, so there was a lot of that, creating a coherent world challenges.

DEAD BOY DETECTIVES

JOINS THE SANDMAN UNIVERSE ON NETFLIX – WE MEET THE CAST AND CREATORS

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

GHOST 07

A CHANCE

George Rexstrew, Kassius Nelson and Jayden Revri.

THE LIVE-ACTION JOURNEY for Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* comic spin-off *Dead Boy Detectives* – about two teenage boys who die, but whose ghosts hang around to solve mysteries – has been long.

Showrunner, executive producer and writer Steve Yockey had been a fan since the duo first appeared in 1991 and, as part of his overall deal with the studio, approached Warner Bros and DC to see if he could have the property. They said no. Then in 2019 *The Sandman* finally made it to the screen.

"Then the studio was more willing to let me give it a shot," Yockey explains. The pilot was completed in October 2021, by which time the characters had appeared, played by different actors, in a *Doom Patrol* episode also written by Yockey. But his work on *The Flight Attendant*, world events and Hollywood strikes meant that production on *Dead Boy Detectives* only picked up again in late 2022, moving from original home Max to Netflix.

"It allowed us the freedom to be a little more integrated with *Sandman*, which was exciting," says co-showrunner, EP and writer Beth Schwartz. "Just because we really do live now on the same Netflix-verse. But we didn't really *change* any of our stories. It was always the idea because our two main characters are running from Death. That's basically the world that they live in. So it was always going to be in that world, but the shows are so different."

Yockey teases: "Netflix encouraged us, even though we were already in production, to find some Easter eggs, some surprises, that because we're on the same network we're now allowed to include that we weren't allowed to include before. I would obviously love to continue to cross-pollinate, where it makes sense, with *Sandman*."

Gaiman also created a new character for the series, who works in the afterlife's lost and found department. "He's been super-supportive and super-encouraging that we do our own thing," Yockey says. "We've had some great conversations – when it was time to incorporate some of the larger *Sandman* characters, he was obviously deeply involved in that."

Yockey explains that each iteration of *DBD* has "different creators putting these characters into different worlds" and that this version is the same. "We're telling new stories, they're fun and compelling stories, and hopefully surprising. It should feel like dipping into a whole new world."

One thing it's not is a straight-up adaptation of existing work. "It does not follow the storylines of the comics," says Schwartz. "Obviously our main characters are Edwin, Charles and [teenage medium] Crystal, but it's all very different.

"So it's very loosely based. Then we have a bunch of Easter eggs, with Crystal's parents and some other things, direct frames from the comic books, but it's pretty loosely based. I've done several

Edwin, Crystal and Charles meet the local wildlife.

(Left) Yuyu Kitamura as Niko Sasaki, with cat.

Lukas Gage as Thomas the Cat King: me-ooow.

Jenn Lyon as Esther Finch gets personal with Crystal.

adaptations from comic books, and when you're changing from the medium you have to branch out, otherwise it won't transfer as well. There's so much you can do with the world."

Yockey elaborates. "We describe it as '*Hardy Boys* on acid'. It's young detective stories, just told through this incredibly fucked-up lens. We want to have the overarching emotional story, we want to have the overarching character stories, but we want each episode to be an individual case. That was always going to be our format.

"In terms of cases, sometimes in the comics the cases can be dense in a way that wouldn't lend itself to television. When you've got philosopher cats running around spouting this gigantic stuff, and speaking in Latin... I take those cats, and now they're no-nonsense street bullies. We're making those kinds of changes, but we're →

GEORGE REXSTREW
IS EDWIN PAYNE

How was your experience in this world?
It's a genre that I felt quite new to, acting-wise, because a lot of my experience, up until this point, has been in theatre. It's a harder genre to replicate on the stage, I would say. It's one that experientially you find more in screen work. So it had been limited, but it just made it all the more exciting.

The story of love and loss goes deeper than expected.
I've always been a huge fan of Neil Gaiman's work. What he does so well is he attaches connotations of comfort, adventure and life to concepts that are inherently quite bleak, such as death. What Steve, Beth and the rest of the team have replicated so well is honouring Neil Gaiman's legacy in his own work.

We're set in a very surreal world – there are floating squids, talking cats, my character has a frisson with a half-human half-cat. I mean, it's open to interpretation. So there's a lot of absurdity. But there's a lot of truth that's grounded in it.

In terms of Edwin, it's clear that when I was working through what his journey was initially in the show, and moving from episode to episode, it really felt to me like this was a learning of how to love, a discovery of love. It stems from that experience, probably with an absent mother and father, at [boarding school] St Hilarion's. This boy hails from a time where public displays of affection are frowned upon, let alone homosexuality. There's something very interesting about a boy who was 16 years old, but has also existed for 123 years having to reconcile with that for the first time.

Were special effects and monsters strange to work with?
Because this was my first experience on a TV set as not just a lead role, but as any kind of a role of notable significance, I didn't know anything else. So the overwhelming parts at the beginning were doing a scene surrounded by 150 crew members, the static nature of filming compared to running a play from beginning to end. It was a challenge I relished and I feel like I rose to.

So when it comes to the VFX side of things, it just came as part of the parcel. I think back to times when I was a kid and I played with my brothers, we'd be playing chase with imaginary monsters and stuff. So to call back to that wasn't as difficult as perhaps I had expected. At drama school they didn't teach acting opposite a tennis ball, but I would consider myself a pro now!

What was your most "out there" moment during filming?
I will describe my first day on set for you, because I think that set the tone for how wacky, wonderful and whimsical this show is. I had three scenes. My first was a stunt scene, where I was throwing Jayden's double through a mirror. It was a scene that was eventually cut from the pilot. It was in the snow and rain. My second scene was a walk and talk with Kassius and Jayden on ice, and there were about 40 background artists who had to pretend they couldn't see us. And my third scene was talking with Sebastian the cat, who unfortunately didn't make the cut – he was replaced because he wasn't behaving at his best.

So that was just a surreal entry into the world of *Dead Boy Detectives*. And to be honest, I think after the audience watches the pilot they will be left with a very similar feeling of joy, wonder and whimsy.

JAYDEN REVRI
IS CHARLES ROWLAND

Charles has a lot more going on than you first expect...
It was a privilege and it was a chance for me to use the platform and the opportunity to raise awareness for some serious things that happen to real people. That's the beauty of Charles, he's your best friend and he'll always be there for you. But underneath that chipper upbeat facade is a sensitive boy who hasn't dealt with things that happened to him in his past. Throughout the series you see him deal with them and you see him overcome them and it was an honour really to be able to represent.

What's it like working with cats?
I'll be honest, I really struggle not to stroke the cats. We were really lucky to work with this amazing team who had all these trained animals. We had a raven on set, and we had cats and they were so well behaved. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. But they were so cute. You're told as actors, "You stand there, you ignore the cat, you let the trainer do their work." But I struggled. I love cats, so it's hard.

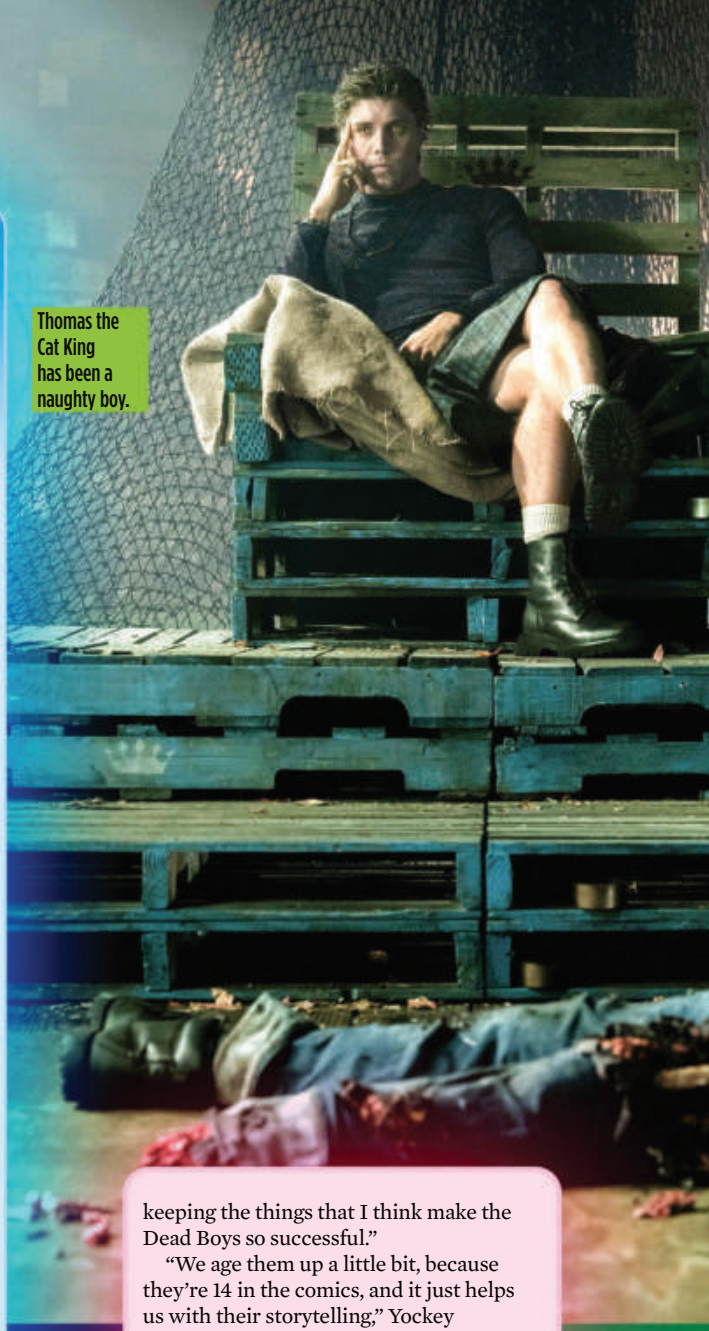
How friendly was the raven?
His name was Grimble. He was a character. He liked to talk back a lot when he wasn't supposed to be in the scene.

What was it like seeing finished episodes?
We all put so much hard work into the series, and other cast especially – we sat down together and really picked out all of the key or special moments in the series and wanted to make sure that the audience would feel those. To watch it and see those special moments that we really tried to portray, to see that they came up... I'm so proud of everyone that worked on it and I'm really proud of myself. I'm just super excited for everyone else to see it now.

What do you hope people take from the show?
It's a show about love, friendships and grief. It's colourful, it's magical. It is everything that you need, and I really hope that people can relate to every character.

I really hope that people can see that you can be whoever you want to be. And I hope people like Charles!

"You have a look." "No, you." "No, YOU."



Thomas the Cat King has been a naughty boy.

keeping the things that I think make the Dead Boys so successful."

"We age them up a little bit, because they're 14 in the comics, and it just helps us with their storytelling," Yockey continues. "Because the deeper into the season you go, the darker and more adult it gets and we wanted to have the freedom to tell those stories.

"So we were true to their backstories and we were true to details in Crystal's character. But everything else is either new, or inspired by or reappropriated from different areas of the comic book. So it's really fun, because we want to include all of these different things, but some of the ways that we include them might surprise people."

Despite the main characters being dead, the beating heart of the show is their growth and their relationships.

"For us in the writers' room, it was: 'Okay, it's a detective mystery, it's a horror show and it's a soap. So we need to have all of these elements. Because it's a show mostly about young people, living and dead, that has to be a part of it. The relationships have to be a part of it," Yockey explains.

Crystal Palace (yes, really) visits some graves.

Michael Beach as Tragik Mick: bit harsh, surely?

> "This feels a little like old-school television, except that the content is drugged-up"

Kailey Spear, Ruth Connell and Samantha Spear.

Edwin with Joshua Colley as Monty, and Niko.

"I'm not interested, as a storyteller, in nodding to something and then not embracing it. So if we're going to have gay characters, they're going to be gay, and they're going to be figuring stuff out and that's gonna be a part of who they are. And the show is not about it, but it's a reality. I would argue that the Cat King is a pansexual predator. But we have all sorts of representation in the show, and I feel really good about it."

Schwartz adds: "It's such an interesting take because of the time period that Edwin was living in. So he's very behind. What I love about the show so much is it's a coming of age story for all our characters. But specifically for our two boys. They're figuring out who they are in their afterlife, and because they didn't have a chance to figure it out when they were living it's just so... We always say in our room that tonally bittersweet is what our show is. That has a bittersweetness of, 'Oh, that's so tragic when you think about it, but it's also so sweet when you think that they still have this chance to grow in their afterlife.'"

Speaking of keeping things real, the showrunners also applied that to the many monsters and effects throughout the series. "Steve and I made a conscious effort to do as much practical as we could," Schwartz says.

"We have a lot of visual effects, and we have an amazing team. But if we could do it practically, we would start there and then we would add visual effects if we needed.

"I remember the first time I went to the production office, and I saw some of the designs for episode two, the rainbow puke. I was like, 'Oh, this is such a *fun* show.'"

"I think it shows that we had such a creative team and everyone really went there and just went along with what a fun world we get to live in." Yockey laughs. "I think a giant spider made of baby doll heads was probably a place where we went a little bonkers. This feels a little like old-school television, except that the content is drugged-up and scary."

Yockey says they have plans for future series mapped out, but won't elaborate. "If we get a season two, we have plans coming off the end of season one.

"We also have some ideas for season three. We're ready. We've got the ideas. We've got the stuff. I don't want to say too much, just because a lot of it comes off the finale."

Schwartz hints at a longer gameplan. "Steve and I have talked about the very, very end of this series, but this is the kind of show that really could go on forever because the cases are so much fun and they get wilder and crazier as we go.

"Our characters, there's no limit to where we can take them and where they can grow. So we'll be on for as long as Netflix has us."

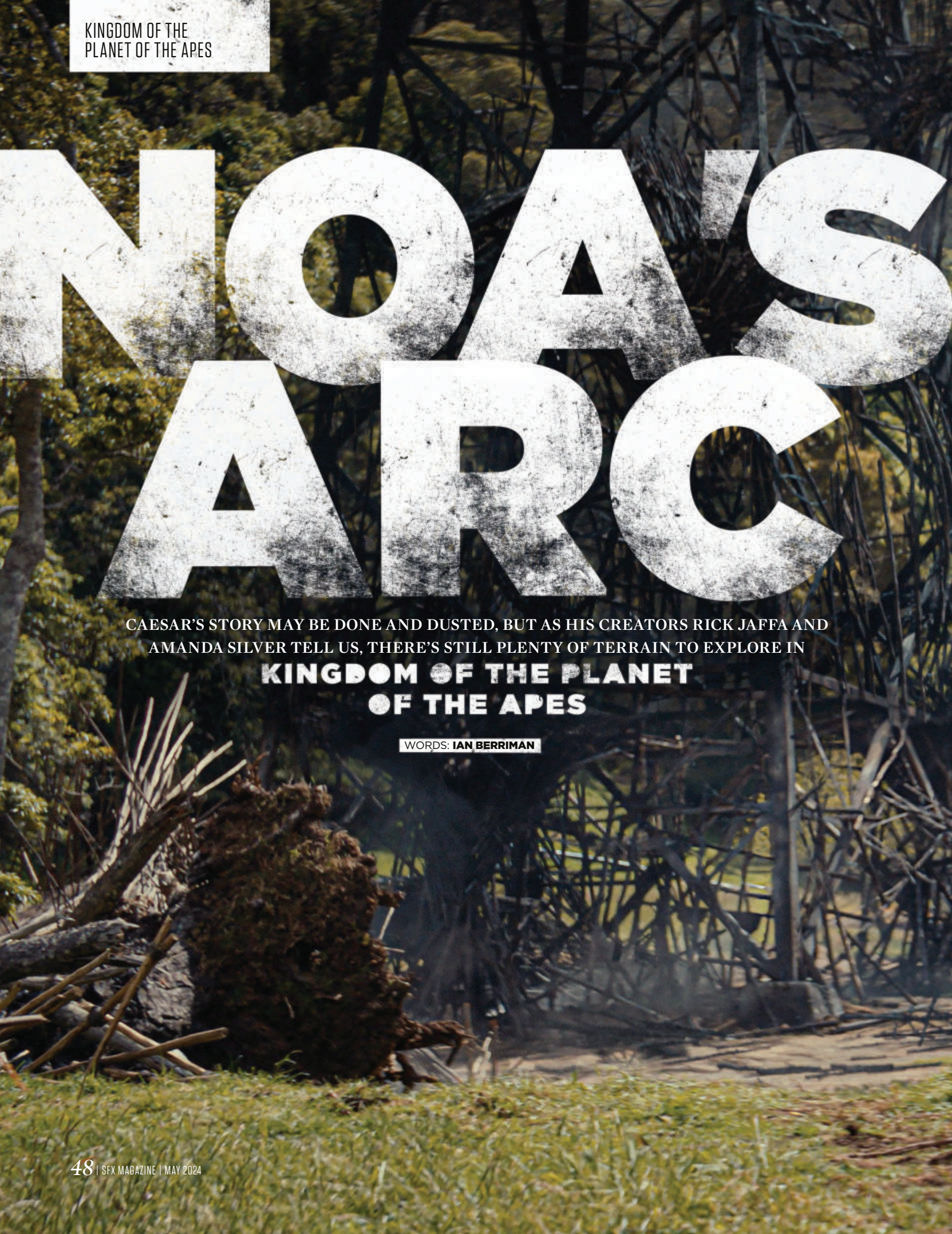
Dead Boy Detectives is on Netflix from 25 April.

"Make like a tree and... just stand there? Oh."

NOA'S ARC

CAESAR'S STORY MAY BE DONE AND DUSTED, BUT AS HIS CREATORS RICK JAFFA AND AMANDA SILVER TELL US, THERE'S STILL PLENTY OF TERRAIN TO EXPLORE IN KINGDOM OF THE PLANET OF THE APES

WORDS: **IAN BERRIMAN**



THE REBOOTED *PLANET OF THE Apes* franchise has been running far, far longer than the original film series did. Okay, that's largely down to the slower pace of production when you're replacing human actors with CG creations, rather than glueing prosthetics onto them... Still, it's no mean feat that the revival is well into its twelfth year, with a fourth entry – designed to kick-start a fresh trilogy – in cinemas shortly.

Two people who've been there from the beginning – right back to the original pitch in 2006 – are husband-and-wife writing team Rick Jaffa and Amanda Silver. As the scriptwriters of 2011's *Rise Of The Planet Of The Apes*, they created Caesar, the chimp who, in the wake of the spread of a virus that both devastates human society and elevates apekind, strives to find a way for the two sides to peacefully coexist.

CAESAR LATER

They've been helping to shepherd the franchise as producers ever since – racking up script credits on first *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes* and now *Kingdom Of The Planet Of The Apes*. There aren't many writers who can boast such longstanding involvement in a blockbuster franchise. How do the pair reflect on that?

"We just hung in there!" Silver tells *SFX*, with a laugh. "And it's not easy with these franchises, because the movies are so expensive and so big. It's kind of a wild ride."

"It's felt kind of natural, to be honest," adds Jaffa, "especially with the first three movies, because Caesar was so important to us. He became part of our family really, and – not to sound too weird – sort of grew up with our kids, so it was important to us to stay with that. Luckily we've been able to do other things, so it's not just apes and their travails. But it's been quite an adventure for us as well. I feel like each one of these movies takes about three years off my life!"

Incoming director Wes Ball (best known for the *Maze Runner* movies) was the catalyst for this fourth entry, devising the basic concept. "Then Fox reached out to us," explains Jaffa. "We weren't available as writers, so we brought in Josh Friedman, who worked with us on the *Avatar* movies. He did the first three drafts and did a beautiful job." The couple then took the reins for a fourth draft, with another writer, Patrick Aison, performing the final polish.

Following the wrapping up of Caesar's story with the character's death in 2017's *War For The Planet Of The Apes*, *Kingdom* jumps forward in time, resulting in a trailer which, with its scenes of apes on horseback pursuing feral humans, seems awfully familiar to fans of the 1968 original. So have we reached the point where if Charlton Heston's Taylor were transplanted into the story, he'd feel at home?

"I asked you about this!" Silva says to her husband. "You did the math. We are now chronologically about 300 years after Caesar's death. But Taylor lands..."

"...3,600 years from now," Jaffa finishes. "Well, I think so. I don't know why I don't know the exact number! All of us felt from the beginning that this next movie should be far enough down the road that there's some remembrance of Caesar, and some legacies left behind, but the apes have definitely moved on."

The passage of time is evident in the trailer, through striking images of human civilisation's disintegration: crumbling bridges, overgrown skyscrapers, the rusting hulks of great ships. But presumably there are changes to ape society too? "Yes, the world has changed dramatically," Jaffa says, teasing how its dominant lifeform is now less of a monoculture. "The apes have gone in different directions. It hasn't been just a straight line with Caesar and then his straight lines of descendants."

"So there's room for surprise, and elements of discovery for the audience," Silver continues, "as they see where the apes and the humans are 300 years later."

A new protagonist takes centre stage here: Noa (yes, no "H""), played by *It*'s Owen Teague, a naïve young chimp who as the film opens knows nothing about the world beyond his village.

Judging by the trailer, in which he rescues a human woman from a rampaging gorilla, and declares, "Apes hunt humans. That is wrong", he's sympathetic towards our species. Does that stem from scientific interest, like that of Roddy McDowall's Cornelius? Or from some other place?

"I don't think he comes into the movie interested in humans so much," Jaffa says. "I would say he's on a journey to get to there."

"He comes into this movie very disinterested in humans, and very dismissive of them," Silver says. "With this franchise, the question, 'Can human and ape live side by side?' is a question that we ask again and again, and Noa is grappling with that very question. He comes quite a long way during the course of the movie in his understanding of what it means to be a human."

"He's on a journey of discovery, really," says Jaffa, "but also discovery of the outside world – and Caesar is a big part of that."

The movie could easily have taken a clean slate approach, but from the sound of it Andy Serkis's character still casts a shadow. "Certainly his legacy does," says Jaffa. "This is hundreds of years after Caesar passed, but he was kind of a Moses character, so his legacy really is important, thematically, to what we're attempting to do in this movie.

Noa (played by Owen Teague) and his eagle.

Raka is played by Peter Macon. Stylish ape.

Just what's going on with Nova (Freya Allan)?

DRESS CODE

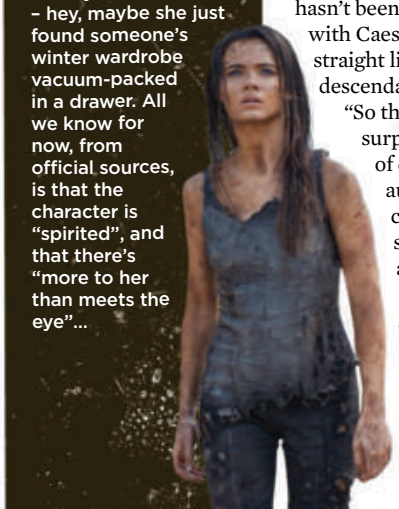
What's the deal with Nova's duds?

The most enigmatic character in the new film is the one played by Freya Allan (Princess Cirilla in *The Witcher*), who's billed as Nova.

Watching the trailer, you could assume that she's just like any of the other humans fleeing in panic as apes sound the horn for a hunt. And that, since the character isn't heard to speak, she's a 2024 analogue of Taylor's love interest of the same name.

But wait! Those other humans are clad in animal skins, but Allan's character is clearly wearing a vest and trousers. How did they last 300 years? Do we know for sure that she's mute? Could she even be from a different time period...?

This is purely conjecture, and could be *way* off the mark – hey, maybe she just found someone's winter wardrobe vacuum-packed in a drawer. All we know for now, from official sources, is that the character is "spirited", and that there's "more to her than meets the eye"...



Proximus Caesar (played by Kevin Durand).

Proximus has big ambitions for apekind – too big?

"In these kinds of franchises, you try to juggle two things that are equally important," he explains. "One is as you push forward you have to tell something fresh and new. You can't just be rehashing stuff you've already done. But you also have to honour what's come before, and I think we've found a way to, at least thematically, keep Caesar alive."

A second major ape character is Proximus Caesar, the Latin term "proximus", in this context, presumably meaning "next"; the name as a whole thereby presenting him as the inheritor of Caesar's mantle. Played by genre stalwart Kevin Durand, this bonobo has a fascination with acquiring human learning – and salvaging their artefacts.

He cuts an imposing figure: gold crown atop his head, red flags fluttering around him, inspiring fearful awe as he walks among the subjects of his coastal community. With his talk of "conquering", you get the feeling that "Ape shall never kill ape" is not a precept this guy adheres to...

We've seen apes with a darker side before. How does Proximus compare to a character like, say, Koba, the antagonist of *Dawn*?

"Well, Koba's drive and anger really came from the mistreatment he received, and trauma," Jaffa explains. "Proximus doesn't have that. He's really hijacked Caesar's legacy for his own gain and it's a natural progression, I think. It's very human, also."

"He's very optimistic, and very ambitious," Silver adds. "There's this idea that an ape's reach should exceed his grasp... He's excited, you know?"

"He's learned a lot about what it means to be human by studying human history," Jaffa continues, "and you can see how that's influenced him in terms of his agenda. He's using the tools available to gain power. It's kind of a universal character, really..."

"...A character that's recognisable throughout history, and has appeared again and again," Silver says.

"Yeah – they keep showing up, these guys!"

THE ADVENTURE GAME

Sounds to us like a strongman (in the political sense). A simian Mussolini, even?

"But it's not just power for power's sake," Jaffa emphasises. "I mean, he's really put a lot of thought into this whole journey that he's on."

Does this fourth entry embrace any particular film genre, we wonder, pointing out that *War For The Planet Of The Apes* drew on the aesthetics of the Western.

"Screwball comedies, mostly," deadpans Jaffa. "Barbara Stanwyck movies. That would be fun, though – talk about surprise, holy cow!" Silver steers the conversation onto a more serious path... "Wes was really interested in infusing some adventure, and I think we definitely get that feeling in the best ways. Obviously we're still doing deep sci-fi, and there's some thriller in there."

In terms of ape politics? By which we mean power struggles amongst apekind.

"Yes, without question," Jaffa says. "What could be argued, though, is that the apes' politics has evolved from chimpanzee politics as it exists in our world today into what is more human politics. That's something we really delve into. So thematically there's some really interesting questions going on.

"On the other hand, it is a coming of age story about this one chimp. As I was saying, it can't just be the same thing over and over. So I think it leans a little more into adventure than it does thriller."

Given that this is the fourth in the series – or even (depending on how you choose to count), the tenth, there may be some cinemagoers who feel like they've comprehensively been there/done that with the *Apes* saga. What would the two say to convince those people to shell out on tickets?

> **"It hasn't been just a straight line with Caesar and then his straight lines of descendants"**

"Well, the world has changed," Jaffa says. "On a thematic level it's asking different questions, and the characters are different. I'd also say the same thing that you could say for *Avatar* or *Dune*: it's visually stunning. There's nothing like it, really. That experience, in the theatre, of a whole new world. Yes, it's our world, but our world looks different."

"It's a beautiful film, anchored in beautiful characters that you really care about," says Silver, taking the baton for the pitch. "Yes, you've got this epic landscape, but none of it works unless it's anchored by great characters and a compelling story. This next adventure offers things that are brand new, fresh surprises, while being familiar and while honouring the past."

Of course there remains all that Wētā wizardry. "Those guys are geniuses," says Jaffa, before making an embarrassing confession. "There's an eagle – it's in the movie quite a bit [trained by Noa, like a falconer], and I swear to God: the first time I saw it in the editing room, I thought it was a real eagle. You'd think after four of these movies I'd catch on!"

Kingdom Of The Planet Of The Apes is in cinemas from 10 May.

NINE LIVES

ON SET FOR THE FINAL SERIES OF INSIDE NO 9, STEVE PEMBERTON AND REECE SHEARSMITH REFLECT ON THE TYRANNY OF THE TWIST

WORDS: **DARREN SCOTT**

LATE JANUARY, AND *SFX* IS AT another vast stately home in England for filming on a gothic production.

"Joanna Lumley said 'Fuck off' in this room," Steve Ryde, executive producer of *Inside No 9*, tells us. Not that she's appearing in the ninth, and final, series of the iconic British anthology show – that we know of, at least. We're informed that Arley Hall in Cheshire, where their penultimate week of filming is taking place, has also recently been used for Netflix's *Fool Me Once*, as well as *Peaky Blinders*.

We're in a library, which is almost floor to ceiling with books. Right in front of us is the famous No 9 hare, sitting opposite a bust of one of the guest actors. "We'll probably give it to him," Ryde says of the sculpture. The hare – which makes a hidden appearance in every episode – is one of many copies, we're told. Fact fans: it has blue felt underneath.

Outside the bay window there are a large number of vans filled with production essentials. Someone is painting a strange wooden shape bright green...

BITTERSWEET SYMPHONY

Adjourning to the dining room, via those pesky creaking floorboards that plague almost every period production, crew are stoking the fireplace as Steve Pemberton gets direction. Lillian the maid (Hayley Squires) is taking position. Reece Shearsmith appears to be holding an aged piece of paper. The crew bring in plates of leftover food. Pemberton takes his seat, his collar is dishevelled.

"Everyone quiet! Standby! Action!" someone yells. Lillian clears the plates. It's a scene where Pemberton and Shearsmith's characters are being introduced, involving a manuscript that's been "found jammed".

"It isn't poppycock, Lillian, ever since Ludwig it's been a decisive landmark," Pemberton's character warns. He walks over to a gramophone and pretends to light a cigarette. Ready for a take, costume comes in to fix his collar, while make-up comb his moustache.

Scene 430/Take 1 is marked by a clapperboard with the *Inside No 9* logo. The boom goes into shot so it's quickly on to take two. "It looks to be part of a symphony," one of the characters notes. "To embark upon symphony number nine is considered a folly..."

To add to our experience, there's a smell of food – potatoes, peas, red wine and gravy, to be precise – mixed with fake tobacco.

The record on the turntable? Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No 9* by the L Jones Orchestra. So what's the story here?

"This one we're doing now is called 'The Curse Of The Ninth,'" Pemberton tells us. "It's all about a superstition in classical music that once you've composed your ninth symphony, you're going to die. We thought it was quite →

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A shot from the new series. Who are these?

fitting for us to have the curse of the ninth over us on that ninth series. It's also really about writer's block, and what are the things that block you from being creative? So, all in all, we thought it was a good thematic thing to save this one for the ninth series, and hopefully we don't drop down dead next week."

"They've been in our heads a long time, these scripts," says Shearsmith. "So it's nice when you finally get to do them."

"I play Dickey Vanaass," Pemberton says. "He's a friend of the family, looks after the business affairs. So knows Lillian, who's married to the composer Nathaniel Burnham [Eddie Marsan], who has this fear of the ninth."

Shearsmith, hair slicked into a curl, adds: "I'm a character that comes around called Jonah Quigley who's a piano tuner. So I come to the house quite innocently..."

The episode has been described as Gothic, we note. "I guess, because it's period," Shearsmith offers. "We haven't done many period. In fact, we've only done the witchfinder one in the 17th century."

Pemberton adds, "We did the '70s. But we don't think of it as period because we lived it."

Shearsmith scoffs. "Well, I was one... So yeah, in my mind that's not period."

The witchfinder episode, aka "The Trial Of Elizabeth Gadge" from series two, is Reece's favourite – at least at the moment, with it always changing. "This now is becoming my favourite, so maybe it's a thing about period for me," he considers. Pemberton can't choose but says "the live one ["Deadline", the 2018 Halloween special] was very exhilarating to do."

"Dead Line", with Stephanie Cole.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

When we catch up with the duo weeks later, filming is finished and it's days before post-production on the series is completed. There are, they explain, "a few tiny little special effects to go in." These are more for correction rather than going out with a CG-heavy last episode. "We haven't got that, it's not *Dune*," Shearsmith deadpans.

But how are they feeling now that the end is in sight?

"We don't regret the decision to finish," Pemberton states. "It feels like the right time, just the perfect symmetry of nine series for *Inside No 9*. It won't be until they go out and we see the reaction to them going out that it becomes final. Because even when you filmed the last day – it was very emotional, but then you're aware that you're still going

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Left to right: "A Quiet Night In", "Merrily, Merrily", "The Devil Of Christmas".

(Below) "Empty Orchestra".

"The Trial Of Elizabeth Gadge".

to be the next day going into the edit, and you're working on it.

"That post production process is still very much part of making the episodes, obviously. So that's when we will take a breath and reflect on what we've managed to achieve.

"There's a bit of sadness and there's a little modicum of relief in there as well. Because the idea of coming up with six new stories for series 10...

"We always talk about 'the tyranny of the twist' and how many times you can do a surprise. When people are starting to get your writing or get your rhythms, it's really hard to keep one step ahead of your audience.

"I think we've managed to do it. Pulling off the episode last series, '3 By 3', was very exciting. We don't want to go stale and we feel very confident with this last series. So it's sad, but a relief at the same time."

Shearsmith nods. "We were talking the other day about something that was a good twist and Steve said, 'Yeah, the problem is, we've done 55 of them.' One good one is fine, but try to do 55!

"We never knew we would get here. But now of course, we just wish it was *Inside No 2* and we'd have been done years ago," he jokes, adding: "It's a lovely thing to have."

INSIDE INSIDE NO 9

Don't go expecting a cataclysmic final episode, however. "It's an anthology, so there's no way of doing anything that ties it up," Shearsmith says. "We were thinking, maybe you could do a return to some characters from another one that will make it quite special or different and something that we haven't done. But in the end, we felt like we should just do six more stories, like we always have done. It is an anthology – don't treat this series any differently, really."

Lee Mack guests as the host of "3 By 3".

As for what's in store for the final six instalments, genre fans won't be disappointed.

"We've always enjoyed having a mixture within the series, so we wouldn't make a full series that leaned into horror," Pemberton explains. "But within this series, you could say 'Boo To A Goose' is really horrific. It's not horror, but it's tense. It's got a great '70s-sense brooding soundtrack to it. We've got an episode which is set in an escape room, and the escape room is horror-themed. So that's a quite nice and creepy episode.

"We've got one which is a bit more Gothic, it's a period piece, and it feels a bit like *A Ghost Story For Christmas* vibe to it. We've definitely enjoyed exploring all different kinds of storytelling devices and different genres as we have throughout the whole series."

"It's quite telling when we were trying to put them in in order to just make them all feel different and not have so many dark and brooding and disturbing ones next to each other. We couldn't do it," Shearsmith laughs. "They're all quite horrible. We've got a few →

(Left to right) "Bernie Clifton's Dressing Room", "Wuthering Heist", "Tempting Fate".

A starry cast for "Private View".

(Below) "The Last Weekend".

lighter ones, but it was like, 'Oh, that's quite relentless.' So maybe that tells you something about the tone of the last series," he laughs.

Looking back over the last decade, and 55 episodes, we ask them to reflect on the most ambitious of their ideas.

"'Deadline' was something that I thought that they would question," Shearsmith considers. "It was one idea to do a live one, but then to wilfully look like it was going to go wrong? And would they allow that – because, of course, immediately, it looks like it's failed and people might switch off.

"I thought the last thing that they will sanction is anything where people might just turn off, because that's the opposite of what they want when you're making a television programme. So I was surprised they even said yes, at that stage, but they embraced it.

"They really liked the idea of it. A lot of people did turn off. But it's only added to the mythos and the success of it, I guess, because it was very convincing on the night. So that was hard to pull off.

"I suppose '3 By 3' as well was tricky, the episode that we did last season which was the game show – just keeping a lid on it, keeping it as a surprise is hard enough full stop."

"In terms of just being able to tell a story we wanted to tell and in the way we wanted to tell it, 'Private View' was quite hard," Pemberton recalls. "Because you're trying to do a classic Agatha Christie-esque 'kill all the characters one by one'. It's quite hard to do in 29 minutes. I think we managed to bump off five or six different characters within that time.

"But that's one where you felt like you want it to go to at least 45 minutes. We've always had to stick to our running time and occasionally that's felt like you've made some compromises. But these are minor complaints really, given what we've been able to achieve and the freedom that we've been offered by the BBC. We've had creative freedom. Even though you're on a limited budget, you make those limitations work for you."

"Merrily, Merrily", with guest Diane Morgan.

As for the most fun episode to film, they're both in agreement.

"'Merrily, Merrily' was great, going out on that pedalo," Pemberton recalls. "It was fun to be outdoors. It was so unique for us. Obviously we reunited with Mark [Gatiss], so we just had this instant bond and we had all our little in-jokes. Then you throw Diane Morgan into the mix, who was a big fan of *The League Of Gentlemen*. She loved sitting on that pedalo with us while we were doing all our silly nonsense."

Shearsmith chuckles. "She said, 'It feels like I've won a competition.' God bless her. It was fun. We laughed a lot that week. 'Boo To A Goose' [from the new series], that was good fun. It's rare when you get a lot of actors in, because it's just fun to sit with them and catch up and chat and be actor-y and hear all the

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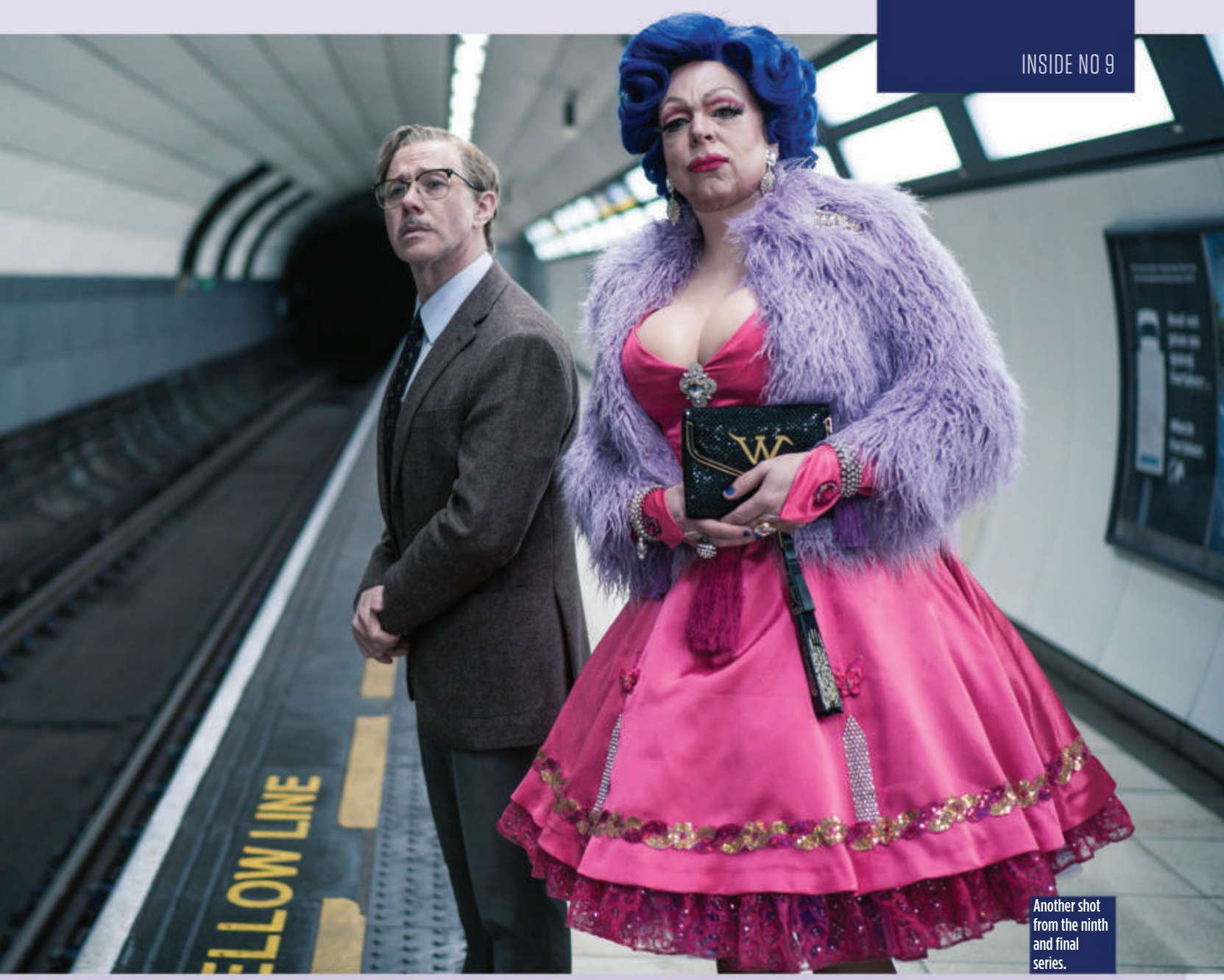


Another shot from the ninth and final series.

stories. So that's always good. It's harder when it's just me and Steve, because we just get on with it. It's quite serious."

Despite nine series and over 50 episodes, there were some ideas that got away – for the moment, at least.

"We've had a few along the way that were bigger. Maybe we were told at the time we can't do that, that's the film version," Shearsmith says. "We had one that was set in a funfair, it was on a ghost train, which was a bigger idea. There are things that we've thought of that you could see how they'd stretch.

"Also they were slightly stretching the conceit – we always tried in our minds to logically square the *Inside No 9*-ness of it. So you stay in wherever you are. We've stretched it a bit occasionally, but we've always had a rationale for how we've managed to maintain it.

"There was a musical version of an idea that didn't quite end up happening, because it was such a lot of work to try and get the music written before, in time to be able to sing it on the set and things. Logistically, it was difficult.

> **"There was a musical version of an idea that didn't quite end up happening"**

"So that's something we never did, and is very clearly a genre that you could do as a singular episode of its own. But nothing's wasted. We've got, hopefully, a few things that we could return to that could become the next thing we might try to do."

They agree that *Inside No 9* could work as a film. "It's the obvious anthology idea where you're telling a number of stories over the length of your film," Pemberton muses. "But absolutely, we could go down the route of talking about films. The beauty of TV is that when you get the green light, you know that you're able to go next year, and we've been on this decade, really, of knowing next year we've got another series. We're huge film fans, obviously, that comes through all of our work. We'd love to do another film. So maybe that's something which we'll ponder after this series has gone out."

Completists, listen up: they want a full Blu-ray collection to happen, saying they've "had a few conversations". But as for what else could be next...?

"We are talking about possibly doing the stage version of *Inside No 9*," Pemberton says. "Hopefully once we finish this, that'll be something that we talk about next. We'll always want to write together, but your brain needs to fill up again. We've had no chance, we've had 10 years of relentlessly coming up with 55 different complete worlds."

Shearsmith grins. "What we need is to know it's going to be onstage, and then in the credits of the last one say, 'And *Inside No 9* will return to the theatre.'"

Inside No 9 is on BBC Two in May and on iPlayer.

LOST IN THE SHADOWS

THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS OF INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF LESTAT, LOUIS, CLAUDIA AND WHERE THE ANNE RICE UNIVERSE IS HEADING WORDS: **TARA BENNETT**

IS THERE A BETTER EXAMPLE OF the agony and the ecstasy of dysfunctional relationships than the vampiric love/hate story of Louis de Pointe du Lac and Lestat de Lioncourt? Gothic novelist Anne Rice introduced the poster boys of homoerotic hotness in her 1976 novel *Interview With The Vampire*, and vampire storytelling took off in new directions.

Yet despite the characters' incredible popularity, Rice's creations have sputtered in live-action films, with Hollywood clearly too chicken to go as far as her books do. Lestat was disappointingly watered down in interpretations played by Tom Cruise in *Interview With The Vampire* (1994) and Stuart Townsend in *Queen Of The Damned* (2002).

It wasn't until AMC's 2022 television adaptation of *Interview With The Vampire* that series executive producer and showrunner Rolin Jones and his team cracked Rice's sexy/scary/tragic alchemy via the smouldering chemistry of Jacob Anderson's Louis and Sam Reid's Lestat.

FATTER HEARTS

In keeping with the first half of Rice's original novel, season one closed with Louis revealing to his human interviewer, Daniel Molloy (Eric Bogosian), how he and their sired "daughter" Claudia (Bailey Bass) orchestrated Lestat's brutal murder. Two years later, the series returns picking right up with the repercussions of that betrayal, as Louis and Claudia scour the far reaches of Europe seeking others of their vampiric kind.

Executive producers Jones and Mark Johnson tell *SFX* that while the hiatus might have felt long for audiences, there was no break for the writers and crew, as they moved production from New Orleans to Prague and Paris soon after. "We were all a little bit like Louis and Claudia," Jones says. "Packing up, strangers in a strange land."

With the critical success of the show, Jones was empowered to continue crafting a narrative that would surprise readers of the book and viewers new to the story alike. "The challenges all came in the adaptation of the second half because there's a lot to plot," he explains. "We've tried to figure out how we can be as 'honourable' and also aggressive, like we were in season one, with something that isn't plot-driven. We clearly went bigger, which can be a pitfall for folks. But I think we work really, really hard and were very critical on ourselves to make sure that we didn't lose any emotional depth.

"So the people that are expecting season one, you're going to be sorely disappointed in a great way," Jones continues. "We got bigger. We got rawer. Hearts are fatter. And the consequences are way more brutal. They're just bigger. It's all rigged to crack open your heart, and then we pick it up and we throw it against the wall about three more times. That's the deal."

A structure that remains in season two is the splitting of the stories between the past, now following Louis and Claudia, and the present in Dubai, where Malloy is now interviewing a pair of vampires: Louis and his current long-time lover, Armand (Assad Zaman).

Everything in the present, outside of Louis' remembrances, is the work of Jones and his writers' room, with some light lifting from Rice's future books. Jones says that this season will see a significant ramping up of Malloy's history, who does not get a backstory of his own in the books.

"The title of the thing is *Interview With The Vampire*, and we had a book where the

Eric Bogosian returns as interviewer Daniel Malloy.

"I'm so hungry, I could drink a horse."

Armand (Assad Zaman) and Louis (Jacob Anderson).

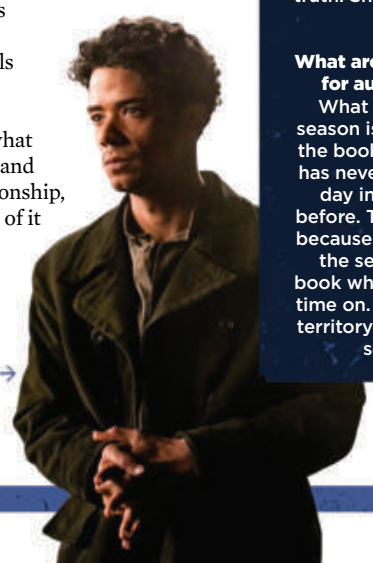
interviewer left for half of it," he explains. "We all collectively said the interview should *matter*. If you're going to cut back to all this exciting stuff that happens in the past, how do you make every time you go back to Dubai worthwhile? We were constantly working on that."

The series also transposes some of past Armand into present Armand so that Malloy, and audiences, can come to be beguiled by their love story. "The Dubai scenes this year are ultimately way hotter than they were last year," Jones promises. "You're watching a two-person play. Then a third guy walks in – now there's three! Go buy some T-shirts, go get some drinks, come back to your seats," he mockingly instructs. "Shit's gonna happen!"

Jones says that the revealing of the more protective – and some might say, secretive – ways in which Armand keeps Louis emotionally safe from Malloy's intrusive prodding gradually unfurls throughout the season.

As does their romance, which in theory has to be as compelling as what audiences watched between Louis and Lestat. "You can't repeat that relationship, and that relationship – the LouStat of it all – is still developing too, right?" Jones notes.

AMC's Rice Universe executive producer Mark Johnson admits, "That was a real problem, because the love affair between Lestat and →



THE DEVIL THAT DOESN'T DIE

Sam Reid hints at Lestat de Lioncourt's unusual return

How would you describe this season's Lestat?
Lestat, potentially, is more Louis than he is himself in season two.

What was the most challenging task the producers had for you this year?
There's a really fucking cool twist in this season that is not in the books that I struggled with because I was like, "This is different, and I'm not sure." But actually, you can justify it because when you look at the books and look at the way that they come out, and what happens in subsequent books after season one, there is a level of an unreliable element. You don't always have to know the truth, because Anne Rice never really tells you the truth. She likes to change it up a bit.

What are you most excited for audiences to see?
What I love about this season is there's a bit from the books that we did that has never seen the light of day in any adaptation before. That was really fun, because it's a great beat in the second half of the book which we spent some time on. We're getting into territory now that no one's seen before.

Louis is so profound, emotional and sensual, all of that. So how was this going to compete? Well, don't have them compete. Have them be different."

"In a strange way, it's more sort of old-fashioned romantic," he says of Armand and Louis, "as opposed to the almost carnality of the Lestat/Louis relationship."

As the pair tell their story to Malloy, it makes the unreliable narrator issue even more compelling. "We began to tease a little bit in season one the cracking open of memory and what was still to be discovered, and that laid a lot of road for us," Jones says.

"We're predominantly 90% playwrights in my room, so it didn't daunt any of us," the showrunner says of crafting this battle of wills. "And we had the right actors. Poor Assad had to sit there, clammed up for a season, but we put him through a big battle of tests before we booked him as Rashid to make sure he could do this. That changed the dynamic."

POWER PLAY

Speaking of dynamic changes, the aforementioned lack of Lestat essentially wiped out a major reason why audiences fell so hard for this adaptation: the LouStat coupling. How do you build a season without the vampire central to Rice's Vampire Chronicles?

"In theory, Lestat is dead," Johnson confirms. "We had to find a way... because both Jacob and Sam became stars, certainly, for *their* story. The question we had throughout was, 'How do we keep Lestat alive?' We found some tricks. He's an apparition and he's a memory, and then it becomes much more than that."

Jones continues, "It's still Louis' show. The interview with the vampire – and vampires this time – is still ultimately about Louis. We want the fullest portrait we possibly can give of Louis, and so we've made the weight of Lestat on him. We've manifested it a little bit," he teases regarding Lestat's appearances.

"It wasn't enough for us to 'playwright' him in, where everybody's talking around him and he's painting on the frame," Jones explains. "We want the audience to experience what it was like [for Louis]. Articulating what was going on for [he and Claudia] and that spectre that's over your shoulder, in your clothes, in your veins, in your head. So we play with it."

That being said, Jones admits that it was a tough adjustment for Anderson and Reid to navigate this season. "It's very clear, they're very, very good friends," Jones observes. "They really do talk every day together. So generally speaking last year, they had each other. They would get off the scene, they'd go to the bench and they would talk. Not the case this year.

"But we have things in store for you," Jones teases. "Everybody knows if we're lucky enough to have a season three that Sam will be front and centre for that one. But he's a supporting character here and does very memorable work with it."

There's also the third vampire in the triangle of angst, the forever 14-year-old Claudia who has been desperately disappointed in her sire, Lestat, and the self-loathing Louis.

This season, it's she who drags Louis to Europe, essentially looking for any other example of their kind that she can look up to. She eventually finds them in the unrepentant and hedonistic vampires of Paris' Théâtre des Vampires, led by Santiago (Ben Daniels).

"This quest that they're on this second season is really hers," Johnson says, explaining that Claudia is a major motivating force for everyone's progression. "She's the one who drives them. She's the one who instigates [Lestat's] murder. She's the one who takes them to Europe to find out: Who are we? Where do we belong? Then we allowed her frustration of being a woman – but in a girl's body – build up. I credit Delainey. She really was able to bring us there."

Johnson is referring to Delainey Hayles, who took over as Claudia after Bailey Bass decided to leave the series. Jones says that with the role in her hands they were able to make the ensuing years count by asking what would be next for a mature vampire stuck in such a hellish place of exterior childhood stasis.

THE SURVIVOR

Jacob Anderson ponders Louis de Pointe du Lac's next chapter

What's it like having Armand as Louis' interview partner this season?
Yeah, so much of [this] is about, why is this interview happening? And now why is Armand so resistant to being included when he's clearly such a big part of Louis's life?

What does Armand represent to Louis?
In terms of what he represents, part of it is like, "I need to try something new. I need a new feel." But that almost instantly backfires. So he represents something different. But it's kind of like same shit, different vampire. Also, what is really important to remember is that Louis very rarely reflects on his own shit and his own destruction within his relationships: to Claudia, to Lestat, to Armand. So that is also a big part of it.

Louis seems even more tortured by Lestat now that he's dead. How does that play out?
Louis is carrying Lestat with him, kind of literally. That is going to massively affect the beginning of a new relationship, carrying your ex on your shoulder the whole time. It gives Louis a sort of blindness to everything that Armand is and isn't.

Louis with Delainey Hayles as Claudia.

THE BRUTAL BEAUTY

Delainey Hayles slips into the skin of the very disturbed Claudia

How was it assuming this role in the second season?
I felt very supported. I watched season one over and over again so I understand how it differs from the book. I read the book whilst watching the episodes. I think that helped me in a way because everything was fresh in my mind.

What is Claudia seeking?
It's tackling vampire loneliness. She's longing for someone to pick her and put her first. She's actually got a lot of love. But her circumstances make it hard for her to admit that. She has a line where she says that she keeps trying and they all go wrong, which sends her down a path of resentment for herself, for what she is, and all the others that she's known.

"I think what was really exciting about it is actually finding a Claudia who starts looking inward," he says. "She's going, 'Hey, maybe it's not just bad luck. It's coming down to, where am I accountable and culpable for how I ended up in these situations?'"

In Paris, through the theatre vampires and meeting the show's remixed version of book character Madeleine (Roxane Duran), a dressmaker, Claudia will come into her own. "Roxane is phenomenal," Johnson enthuses. "She's important for us also because it is such a male-heavy show, so it's good to have another woman who has the strength to take on Claudia."

Not wanting to give away too much about their arc, Jones just offers, "There was an excitement about actually writing, hopefully, a coupling that will mean a lot to people. There's a moment within that story and that arc that is the lyrical height of our storytelling for two seasons. We never beat it."

With *Interview* and *Mayfair Witches* establishing a first round of successful Rice series adaptations, Johnson says they're looking at Rice's prolific body of work with a discerning eye. "She's given us a lot of room to play with," he says. "One of the things I so admire about her is that she's not really writing the same book. We're trying to figure out how best to honour her and give an audience that knows Anne Rice what they want," he continues. "Somehow give each story its own bearing. I want it to be organic, and to say that not every book lends itself to a television show. That doesn't mean they're not good. It just means they can't sustain eight episodes of television."

In terms of Lestat's ongoing story, which is told in several of Rice's books, Johnson confirms that Rolin Jones will be involved in building out his arc. "He is so invested in the Anne Rice universe and wants to be involved, quite frankly, in some of the others that he may not write or create," he shares.

"I think he feels like a proud parent of Lestat and Louis, so anything that involves them, he wants to have a real say. We talked a lot about what we could or could not do. And honestly, who knows if there will be a season three of *Interview*? I certainly hope so. We've talked about what it could be, but don't know entirely yet."

> **"We're trying to figure out how best to give an audience that knows Rice what they want"**

What is clear is that a Talamasca series is being developed by John Lee Hancock (*Midnight In The Garden Of Good And Evil*), which Johnson calls a "John le Carré take" on Rice's secret society which monitors the supernatural. Johnson says that the Talamasca offer the best opportunity of cross-pollination of characters in the future, as they carefully build out their Rice universe.

"So there will be some surprises in this season of *Interview*, and certainly in this second season of *Witches*. I'm hoping that we will have some Talamasca connections throughout all of them."

Interview With The Vampire is on AMC/AMC+ from 12 May, and on BBC iPlayer later this year.

Delainey Hayles replaces Bailey Bass.

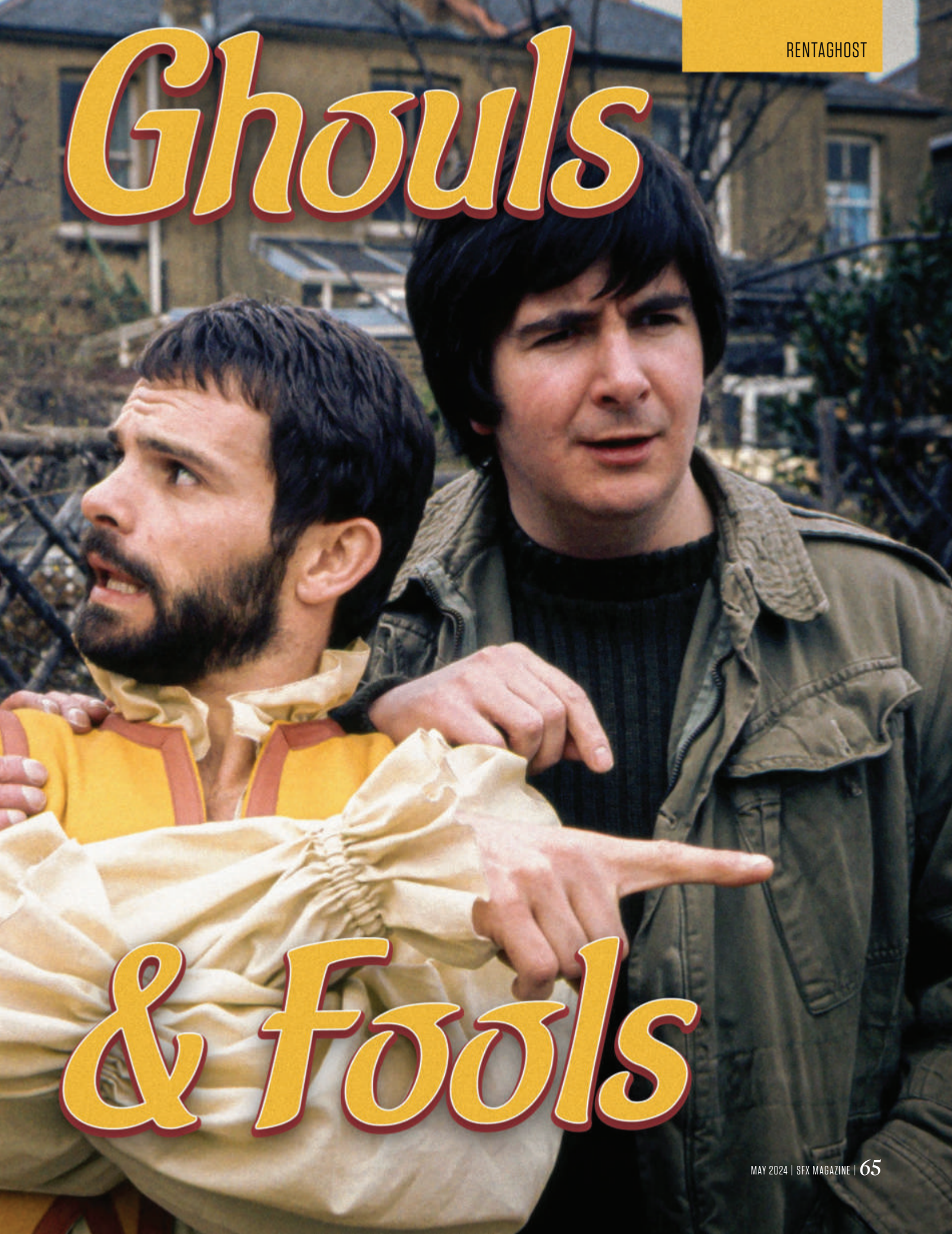
Sam Reid as Lestat de Lioncourt: he's... back?

Spooks & Freaks

Gadzooks! As TV's original paranormal pantomime returns to haunt streaming, SFX catches up with some of the extraordinary fellas behind Rentaghost...

WORDS: **STUART MANNING**

Ghouls & Fools



WITH ITS ECLECTIC cast, broad comedy and supernatural farce, *Rentaghost* was a mainstay of BBC children's TV from the late '70s to the mid-'80s and like nothing else. "*Rentaghost* was *camp*," says actor Christopher Biggins, approvingly. "It was so theatrical, it was so outrageous. I think that's why the kids loved it so much. I mean, what other show has a pantomime horse?"

"A technician once described it to me as 'Plonky actors standing in a straight line, bawling their lines out front,'" recalls the show's producer, Jeremy Swan, with a smirk. "Well, that's what I wanted." Swan directed episodes in each of the nine series, and was the producer for eight years.

Rentaghost debuted in 1976. Writer Bob Block's pilot script was originally titled *Second Chance*, reflecting the original, more downbeat, premise of perpetual loser Fred Mumford (*Ivor The Engine* voice artist Anthony Jackson) trying to forge success in death, having failed to do so in life.

DEAD SERIOUS

In surprisingly bleak territory for a children's slot, Fred was said to have drowned on a cross-Channel ferry trip, with his body never found. His long-suffering parents, not knowing that their returned son was dead, were seen bemused, frustrated and occasionally even traumatised by Fred's attempts to keep both his afterlife and Rentaghost's day-to-day misadventures a secret.

Offering ghostly services to the public, Fred was aided and abetted by colleagues Hubert Davenport (Michael Darbyshire), a fussy Victorian gent decked out in peach, and Timothy Claypole (Michael Staniforth), a hyperactive medieval jester. Darbyshire was a veteran of the Players Theatre and performed vintage music hall routines on the BBC's *The Good Old Days*.

"He was pernickety, just like the character he played," says Swan. "I deferred to him, as he was the senior member of the cast. I remember saying, 'Four days is an awful long time to be rehearsing a 25-minute TV show. I'm thinking of cutting it to three.' He said, 'Don't. Four days is *just* right.'"

Michael Staniforth was a multi-talented performer who also composed and performed *Rentaghost*'s catchy sales-jingle theme tune; it was re-recorded midway through the first

Michael Staniforth as Timothy Claypole.

PICTURES © BBC

series, after its references to seances and ESP were deemed too close to *The Exorcist* territory. Away from the bells and motley, Staniforth was busy on the West End stage, often squeezing in *Rentaghost* recordings before evening curtain calls.

"[Theatrical producer] Cameron Mackintosh's heavies used to turn up in the studio at six o'clock to drag him out, finished or not, to Drury Lane or the Victoria Palace," Swan remembers. "Michael was very clever. He was very acrobatic and would suggest things like skating or cartwheels. I loved working with him."

Jeremy Swan had been a BBC staff director, working on *Jackanory* and other BBC children's shows, when he was assigned to oversee a *Rentaghost* studio session towards the end of the first series, filling in for producer-director Paul Ciani.

"He had an interview for a BBC job in Singapore. He said, 'I'll be back immediately after the interview to take over.' So I went up to Birmingham with the cast and rehearsed. Then Paul turned up, absolutely sloshed, with the jubilation that he'd got the job. He could barely *stand*, let alone take over. So I directed it, and it was the best episode in the series, by a very happy coincidence – nothing to do with me."

Shortly afterwards, Swan was visited by his head of department. "Monica Sims came into my office one day – she used to *slide* into offices with her handbag. 'You've got to take over *Rentaghost*.' I said, 'Yes, fine.' Then I grasped the nettle. 'Do you mind if I make a few changes?' She said, 'Do what you like. We'll only be running it for one more season.'"

Swan made *Rentaghost* faster-paced and lighter in tone – more madcap than macabre. Mr Claypole was no longer a poltergeist, instead becoming a friendlier "sprite", and the ghosts lost their greenish-grey pallor.

"They were all wispy and I didn't like that," Swan explains. "I didn't want it to be scary. There were things like Mr Davenport having a much younger mother, who he'd outlived because she'd died in childbirth or something. I didn't want dead mothers from childbirth, so she went too."

Back In Business?

Rentaghost has yet to be revived... but it isn't for lack of trying

While *Rentaghost* has, appropriately, enjoyed a healthy afterlife in repeats, a remake hasn't materialised. US production company Pidgeon Entertainment picked up the rights almost 20 years ago. "I had been scouting out British kids' properties to reboot for the US market and I came across Channel 4's *100 Greatest TV Kids' Shows*," explains the company's MD, Patrick Pidgeon. "Number 12 was *Rentaghost*. I was drawn to the wonderful title and loved the high-concept premise."

UK company RDF first attempted to develop a TV redux before Hollywood came knocking. "Literally one week before I was going to sign an extension with RDF, producer Gail Berman reached out to me for the film rights."

Berman's credits include *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and Baz Luhrman's *Elvis*. "Gail and I set up *Rentaghost* at Twentieth Century Fox. We brought in the two writers from the *Night At The Museum* franchise, which attracted Ben Stiller. He loved the idea and, at one point, was thinking of directing it."

Stiller was set to play Fred Mumford, but commitments to a *Night At The Museum* sequel and a pet project playing Walter Mitty consigned *Rentaghost* back to the crypt. "The Fox deal sure did sting when it didn't get greenlit," says Pidgeon. "We had a great team in place." Yet he remains optimistic that it will return. "I've had no problem optioning the IP," he adds. "Everyone immediately gets the premise."

Another reason for shifting gears was the arrival of *The Ghosts Of Motley Hall*, an ITV show from *Catweazle* writer Richard Carpenter, featuring comic spectres haunting a stately home. "I watched one and thought, 'This could get a bit dangerous,'" admits Swan. "I went to see Richard Carpenter at Thames Television. I said, 'You have a great show, it's terrific. I just want to show you our storylines, in case there's a clash.' It was all very amicable."

Tonally, Bob Block's comic sensibilities were a world away from *Motley Hall*. His comic influences lay in quickfire US sitcoms, with his writing betraying occasional magpie lifts from Lucille Ball routines. Likewise, Fred Mumford's failure to master ghostly tricks of the trade, such as walking through walls or transportation (the ghosts pinched their noses to disappear), owed a debt to Samantha's bumbling Aunt Clara on *Bewitched*. Block also

> **"A technician once described it to me as 'Plonky actors standing in a straight line'"**

raided his earlier ITV supernatural kids' comedies, *Roberts Robots* and *Pardon My Genie*, reworking various scenes into *Rentaghost* gags.

Swan describes Block as an unassuming, bespectacled figure, not unlike *Rentaghost*'s beleaguered neighbour Mr Perkins. "He was *beyond* Mr Perkins! Compared to Bob, Mr Perkins was like Danny Kaye. But we were on the same wavelength. He would hand-write the scripts with this childish handwriting that you could barely read. Eventually, his wife Madeline said she would type them, and that's the way we got the factory to work."

The final piece in the *Rentaghost* jigsaw was expanding the role of Harold Meaker, the ghost's surly landlord, played by Australian actor Edward Brayshaw with a gorblimey accent. Meaker switched to become the ghosts' manager and boss, and was given a needling, hysterical wife, Ethel. "I thought, there aren't →

Corrie's Sue Nicholls (centre).

Dobbin the pantomime horse.

Christopher Biggins' enormous veg.

Fred Mumford (Anthony Jackson) and Harold Meaker (Edward Brayshaw).

enough women in this, apart from dead mothers, so I brought in Ann Emery," says Swan. "She was wonderful. I remember she had a picture of herself in [actors' directory] Spotlight *screaming*. It was a home number, not an agent's. When I called to tell her she'd got the role, the mother answered the phone. There were *shrieks* of delight in the background."

Over the years, *Rentaghost*'s studio sessions took place variously at BBC Birmingham, Manchester and London's TV Centre, with each episode rehearsed in Acton across a week ahead of recording. Location scenes were usually shot in West London, close to the show's base, with the Rentaghost office exteriors filmed on Princedale Road in Holland Park.

Directing *Rentaghost* wasn't for the faint-hearted. The studio days were complex, with the rapid visual gags relying heavily on bluescreen Colour Separation Overlay to superimpose and overlay elements, all combined live and recorded directly onto tape. Swan would draw detailed storyboards for these sequences, breaking down each shot.

"I had a very good assistant, David Crichton, and I decided it would be good for him to direct a few episodes," he recalls. "I said, 'You've got to do the camera script after the Monday rehearsal.' On Tuesday, I went into the rehearsal room in North Acton and there he was. I said, 'You're in early.' He said, 'I haven't been home!' He'd worked all through the night."

Post-production trickery was limited to inserting the jump cuts to make characters and objects vanish, complete with a memorable *schwhoosh-ding* sound effect. "That was torture," says Swan. "Synchronising all that took hours. All those appearances, jumping in and out, had to be laid on. Then all of it was laid back to master [tape], as they called it. Two weeks later, it would be on TV."

A very happy cast all round...

Nanny the goat joins in 1983.

Mr Claypole can't believe his ears.

Swan's memories of making *Rentaghost* are happy ones, with one exception, when actor Jana Shelden was injured in a fall from a studio rostrum. Her character, semi-regular ghost cowgirl Catastrophe Kate, was riding a rocking horse for an effects shot when the reins broke.

"The leather had perished and she fell off. I was terribly upset. Then there was an endless investigation. There was a department in the BBC who were like the KGB." Shelden subsequently sued the BBC for £36,000, citing impaired hearing, balance, and sense of smell. Swan confirms the story. "The whole cast visited her, screaming with flowers and chocolates – which resulted in Hammersmith Hospital banning them from coming in ever again. There was no point in giving her chocolates because she couldn't taste them. And it was pointless giving her flowers because she couldn't smell them."

The evil McDonald McDougal.

Special effects were used often.

Clock that, Harold Meaker.

PICTURES © BBC, JEREMY SWAN, ARTHUR SIDEY/MIRRORPIX/GETTY

Meaker gets turned into a budgie.

A bit of horseplay in the kitchen.

The '70s run ended with 1979's *Rentasanta*, a 50-minute musical Christmas special, where the ghosts staged a pantomime, recorded a year earlier and delayed for broadcast; most young viewers would have been unaware that Michael Darbyshire had boarded the astral lift a few weeks earlier. The actor died of a heart attack during an interval while performing on stage in Windsor in November 1979, aged 62.

Plans for a fifth *Rentaghost* series were locked in, with recording due to begin the following February. Anthony Jackson had already decided not to return, but now the storylines needed to be rethought to deal with Davenport's absence as well.

Scottish actor Molly Weir, who had guested in a couple of episodes as Hazel the McWitch, was parachuted in as a new regular. "She described me in her autobiography as looking like a young Paul Newman, so I was very flattered," says Swan. "We gave her a pointed hat, which was lethal. If anybody got near her for a close-up, they had their eye poked out, so she soon had the camera to herself."

Bob Block had created the role with Weir in mind, having written for her on the '50s BBC sitcom *Life With The Lyons*. Weir turned 70 during her *Rentaghost* years, but the tiny 4'10" actor was a powerhouse onscreen. "I liked little people in the shows because kids related to small. Molly Weir and Michael were both quite dinky. As was Lynda La Plante."

Yes, *that* Lynda La Plante. In one of her last acting gigs before switching to become a crime writer, La Plante, credited as Lynda Marshall, played Eastern European ghost Tamara Novek. Poor Tamara suffered from hay fever and would sneeze and vanish at the glimpse of a flower.

Another addition to the ranks was Dobbin, a scene-stealing pantomime horse costume brought to life by Mr Claypole. Introduced as a one-off in the *Rentasanta* special, Dobbin was reluctantly adopted by the Meakers, becoming an affectionate pet and harbinger of household chaos. "I thought it was so funny, the idea of this pantomime horse thinking it's a dog, fetching sticks," Swan says. "I thought, 'We've got to keep him in.'"

Roller skating in Painting's Dept Store.

The retooled show moved the focus away from Rentaghost's enterprises, shifting the focus to the Meakers' suburban home and their doomed attempts to keep the supernatural (and a delinquent horse) away from the eyes of prying neighbours Mr and Mrs Perkins.

Lynda La Plante left after just one series, with the role rewritten (barely) as Tamara's cousin Nadia Popov, played by *Coronation Street* actor Sue Nicholls. Nicholls seized her role with gusto, making merry with Nadia's mangled English and hopeless infatuation with confirmed bachelor Mr Claypole – "I would love to run barefoot through that beard!"

While working on *Rentaghost*, Nicholls juggled the series with playing Audrey on *Coronation Street*. "I knew the producer, Bill Podmore," explains Swan. "He'd been a cameraman when I worked on it in the early '60s. I said, 'We can work around it. I'll make sure she gets finished in time to get back to Manchester and rehearse the next day in *Corrie* and then come back down to me. So she went along with this and we had a great time."

"It was the happiest show ever," says Christopher Biggins, who appeared regularly as department store owner Adam Painting. "That was mainly due to Jeremy Swan, who was the most extraordinary producer-director." Christopher's most memorable *Rentaghost* moment came during the countdown to a recording.

"It was a scene with Sue Nicholls and we were mucking about. As they were counting down, 'Five, four, three, two...' I let *rip* with this huge fart. Sue and I thought this was the funniest thing we'd ever heard and laughed hysterically as we did the scene.

"We thought, 'They'll take pity on us and let us re-record this.' We got to the end and Jeremy said, 'Moving on...' 'No, no, no! You've got to let us re-record!' He said, 'No. Let the audience see what amateurs you really are.'"

ROLLIN' WITH IT

Asked to pick a favourite episode, Swan says "It would have to be 'Tangerine'," referring to a 1980 instalment where fame-hungry, tone-deaf Ethel Meaker performed cabaret at Adam Painting's roller disco. The "Tangerine" arrangement was taken from a disco track by US group the Salsoul Orchestra, accompanied by Biggins on maracas.

"Ann was so outrageous," recalls Christopher. "She would go into song at the drop of a hat. She was hysterical. That scene was all down to Jeremy, who saw the theatricality in everything."

The episode was written at the suggestion of Michael Staniforth, a keen skater in real life. Ahead of recording, Jeremy remembers the actors making a trip to a roller disco in Vauxhall as research. "I said, 'We're all going out tomorrow night. I'll take you for fish and chips afterwards on the budget.' It was hysterical. The roller disco fans were all kids, so they were delighted to see the *Rentaghost* cast. Somebody did break a leg or something awful. I think it was Lynda La Plante. She couldn't skate."

Another favourite of Swan's was a show where the Meakers' garden gnome – a Japanese-manufactured Cornish pixie, if we're being precise – came to life to perform a ballet with Dobbin. The role was earmarked for dancer Wayne Sleep, whom Ann Emery had taught to tap dance.

"He didn't want to rehearse. I said, 'Don't worry, Wayne, there's plenty of you around,' and put the phone down. I got a good little dancer in. I thought up a lovely scene where the horse comes on in a tutu and dances in the garden." Dobbin, duly decked out in pink satin, shimmied gracefully to Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* beneath moonlight. "We ended up with this rather atmospheric piece, all set to this lovely music."

Rentaghost reached its ninth and final series in 1984, with a mild refresh that introduced Aimi MacDonald as Suzy Starlight, a ghostly fairy godmother actress moonlighting as a cleaning lady, and Bernie St John, a fire-breathing pantomime dragon. "Don't go into the cellar!" became a catchphrase, followed by a comically-singed victim staggering out from the inferno under the Meakers' staircase. The end came when Jeremy Swan defected from the BBC to ITV franchise TVS, where he directed UK inserts for *Fraggle Rock*. "I think *Rentaghost* had run its course," he says. "The BBC bosses were aware and had gotten tired of it."

> **"I thought it was so funny, the idea of this pantomime horse thinking it's a dog"**

Michael Staniforth died three years after *Rentaghost* ended, aged just 44. "It was awful... AIDS," says Swan. "He was so young. Michael had a laugh like a hyena. I remember us going to the opening of *Noises Off*. Unfortunately, *Noises Off* was about the funniest show you could ever see, so he almost got us thrown out of the theatre."

Forty years later, *Rentaghost* lives on as one of the BBC's most memorable, raucous children's shows: part fantasy, part panto – all combined into a big rowdy party with a "You have been watching" closing wave to viewers. "It was just the most lovely job," concludes Swan. "I mean, that's the best thing you can say about anything, isn't it?"

Rentaghost is available on ITVX.

Brought To Book

THE SFX AUTHOR INTERVIEW

OLIVER K LANGMEAD

Measure for measure: meet a writer who finds the poetry in SF

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Portrait by Barry Douglas

THE TRADITION OF SPECULATIVE POETRY is rich and deep. It's also a minority pursuit. Yet Oliver K Langmead's *Calypso*, a story of terraforming told in verse, looks set to gain far more attention than such a project usually might.

"It's almost like writing in verse is like solving a puzzle," says Langmead of his second verse novel after 2015's *Dark Star*, "because every single line of it has to stick to a certain metre." It's a process, he adds, that "scratches" the part of his brain that "likes solving crossword puzzles". In contrast, "writing in prose is like doing a painting on an infinite canvas."

If that makes the book sound like a dry intellectual exercise, nothing could be further from the truth. Relating its story from four different perspectives, it's a book that moves between the vastness of re-engineering an entire planet and the poignant details of our closest relationships.

It's also strongly rooted in a specific worry: that as spaceflight is monetised, initially by tech billionaires, "capitalism is going to follow us into space". In *Calypso*, this fear is crystallised in a scene where one of the narrators, Arthur Sigmund, arrives on Mars.

"The first thing he's confronted with is the same fast-food chains as Earth," explains Langmead, "which inspires a whole idea of, what if we started again? What if we created an Earth-like planet and put on some blank-slate humans to live there who have no idea about human history?"

In contrast, the book's protagonist, Rochelle, thinks those populating a new world should have the right to know about human history. "They should be able to learn from the lessons we've learned – even though the other argument is we've never learned any lessons," says Langmead.

BALANCING THE SCALES

The book emotionally links Rochelle's perspective on this issue to her reflections on her own personal history. After waking from cryogenic sleep aboard the titular colony ship, she's all too aware that her children likely died years ago. In a situation where the stakes couldn't be bigger, she misses a sense of connection to be found in family life.

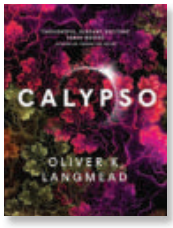
For Langmead, a key to bringing the book's tensions to life was thinking about scale – specifically, how to combine "planet-size ideas with small, intimate moments". In this context, it's intriguing that, in 2018, he had a spell as writer in residence at the ESA's Astronaut Centre in Cologne where, as part of an academic career running in parallel with his literary life, he interviewed spacefarers.

BIODATA

From **Edinburgh**

Greatest Hits
As well as his verse novels, Langmead has written two in prose: the billionaire-satirising *Glitterati* and *Birds Of Paradise*, a fantasy in which Adam still walks the Earth.

Random Fact
The Edinburgh hospital where Langmead was born is now, to his great delight, the university's "research wing into future literatures and future arts".



An influential thinker working in this area is Frank White, who came up with the term "overview effect", the idea that looking down on Earth changes how astronauts think about the planet. State borders disappear. A planet that's vast from a single human's perspective looks "fragile and small" when seen floating in the void. In White's reading, this changes astronauts "instantly".

While drawn to this idea, Langmead's not so sure about the timescale. His experience is that astronauts "are all very different people" with different perspectives on what they've experienced. While Tim Peake is "the busiest guy you've ever met" and involved in education, Frank de Winne, head of the astronaut centre, is "extremely scientific" and told Langmead that he never reads fiction.

A SMALL VOLUME

In contrast, others love literature. "Astronauts usually take something up with them so when they come back down they can give out souvenirs to their friends and family, little things that have been to space," says Langmead. "[Italian astronaut] Samantha Cristoforetti put together the tiniest little book you've seen in your life. I asked her for a copy because I was like, 'I can't find it anywhere, I need to see this book.' It's filled with little quotes from literature that she loves, to do with space and looking down on the Earth."

Other books that have influenced Langmead are rather better known. Growing up in Market Harborough, the son of parents who worked in the arts, Langmead was a huge SFF fan and wrote fan fiction. He namechecks, among others, Ursula Le Guin and China Miéville. When Terry Pratchett came to the local Waterstones to promote *Nightwatch*, Langmead was in the queue.

At university, he studied law before taking masters in both creative writing and fantasy. His parallel careers in academia and literature began to come into focus. These days, both as a writer and a lecturer in creative writing at Lancaster University, he's becoming an established figure.

Even so, something of the fanboy remains. There's a strong eco-SF strand in his work, and we chat about meeting Kim Stanley Robinson. "Sometimes it's lovely to realise that these are people with all of their nuances and strangenesses," he says, "and to peer through the mythology and meet someone who's as human as you." If Langmead's career continues on its current trajectory, people may one day say the same about him.

Calypso is out now, published by Titan Books.

> **“What if we created an Earth-like planet and put on some blank-slate humans?”**

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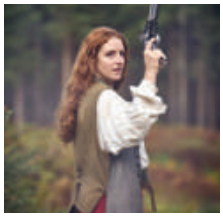

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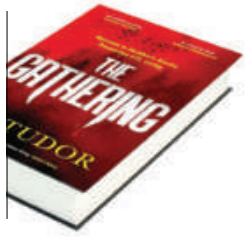

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"Look out! Richard Osman's got a cold."

GHOSTBUSTERS: FROZEN EMPIRE

A cluster of 'busters

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

12A | 115 minutes

Director **Gil Kenan**

Cast **Paul Rudd, Mckenna Grace, Carrie Coon, Finn Wolfhard**

Few films in recent years have delivered such an unexpected emotional gut-punch as 2021's *Ghostbusters Afterlife*. Somehow, even while introducing an entirely new cast, it allowed us to wallow in beautifully measured nostalgia and grief for old friends lost.

But with all due respect now paid to the late lamented Harold Ramis and, by extension, Egon Spengler, what's left for his on-screen family in this sequel? The nostalgia remains in *Frozen Empire*; co-writer and director Gil Kenan lives and breathes the original movie with camera angles, music cues and cameos from 1984's ghosts. You could argue that there's actually too much looking backwards, but at the same time it's hard not to bask in the good-naturedness of it all.

This time round the Spengler family – led by Carrie Coon's Callie and her boyfriend Gary (Paul Rudd) – have moved to Manhattan, taking up residence in the firehouse we know so well. They're busting ghosts as fast as they can, although numbers are surging across the city. Annoying Mayor Walter Peck (hello again, William Atherton!) sees that Phoebe (Mckenna Grace) is too young to work, and so orders her grounded. Bored, she befriends a mysterious ghost named Melody (Emily Alyn Lind), but there are bigger spooks to worry about: namely the ice-spreading Garraka, who freezes the city and demands vengeance for past human slights. Ghostbusters new and old must team up to defeat him.

That's the simplified version: what we actually get on-screen is a tsunami of characters who are

> **"Could have lost at least five of its leads"**

either underused (Finn Wolfhard and Celeste O'Connor are almost ignored) or wheeled out to tick boxes (Bill Murray is fun, yes, but Venkman barely impacts upon the plot). The film could have lost at least five of its leads and cut back its runtime for a leaner, tighter experience; this also could have enabled a vital plot point involving Phoebe to have a better build-up. When the Ghostbusters eventually suit up for the film's climax, there are so many that some of them hardly even register – a case of too many cooks wearing too many proton packs.

Still, there's plenty here that does work. Garraka seems to have been ported over from a Japanese anime and is a truly scary villain for little kids, gifted with memorably spindly fingernails. Kumail Nanjiani also shines as the film's equivalent of Rick Moranis's character from the original. And there's no denying that both the effects and the one-liners, always such important components of the franchise, are on fine form.

Somehow, despite its chaotic cast and illogical plotting, *Frozen Empire* is jolly good fun. You'd still call these 'busters if there was something strange in your neighbourhood – just hope there's enough room to put all the buggers when they arrive. **Jayne Nelson**

i Famously, Venkman calls Peck "dickless" in the original movie. For the US TV version, this was changed to "Wally Wick".

IMMACULATE

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

18 | 89 minutes

Director **Michael Mohan**

Cast **Sydney Sweeney, Álvaro Morte, Dora Romano, Simona Tabasco**

When Hamlet tells Ophelia to "Get thee to a nunnery!" he's being kind of a dick, but at least Shakespeare was not condemning her to the terrors that befall Sister Cecilia when she arrives at her new convent.

Nestled in her remote new home within picturesque Tuscan hills, Cecilia (Sydney Sweeney) devotes herself to bonding with her fellow nuns, helping the sick and serving her Lord and Saviour. Unfortunately, the violent nightmares that interrupt her sleep prove to be more than just figments of her imagination, and it becomes clear that this house of God is more despicable than divine.

The wonderful Sydney Sweeney, who produces and stars, distinguishes herself as an unpredictable creative force here, capitalising on prestige TV and rom-com success. Having previously collaborated with director Michael Mohan on the erotic thriller *The Voyeurs*, she now shines in a taut, delectably twisted horror tale that subverts how the actress has been objectified and underestimated in her career thus far.

Immaculate is a gloriously unhinged tale that is unafraid to be gross, gory and political, and should be entered into with the absolute minimum of prior knowledge. Seriously. Don't even think about the title too much. Just get thee to this nunnery. **Leila Latif**

"Sing when you're winning! You only sing..."

GODZILLA X KONG: THE NEW EMPIRE

There Is Power In A Union

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

12A | 115 minutes

Directors **Adam Wingard**

Cast **Rebecca Hall, Brian Tyree Henry, Dan Stevens, Kaylee Hottle**

***Godzilla Minus One* may have** been a box office minnow in MonsterVerse terms. Yet the ecstatic reception the Japanese film received, and the Oscar it picked up for its visual effects, can't help but cast a shadow over *GxK*, a gargantuan successor to 2021's *Godzilla Vs Kong* that has the inescapable feel of an epic that's arrived late to its own party.

There's certainly a sense that we're on well-trampled ground here, for all the fresh corners of Hollow Earth that Adam Wingard's film uncovers, and the new antagonists obliging a battle-scarred Kong and a now supercharged Godzilla to set aside their differences. Of those, the most striking is Skar King, a malevolent King Louie with fiery red fur who cracks a whip fashioned from some late beastie's spinal column. Fans, however, may be more taken by Suko, an endearing Baby Kong whose cheeky antics offer light relief from an otherwise numbing barrage of Titan tussles and CG smackdowns.

Rome, Cairo and Rio are the cities that endure the most punishment here, with a climactic melee in the latter giving a whole new meaning to hitting the beach. At no point, however, does our world appear to be in any great peril – a consequence, perhaps, of Skar King's murky motivations and a jokey tone that takes its cue from Dan Stevens's larky *Kong* vet Trapper.

As blockbuster behemoths go, *GxK* is never less than noisily, spectacularly bombastic. If this franchise is to flourish, though, it'll have to do something more inventive than merely up the ante. **Neil Smith**

i The scene of Godzilla hibernating in the Colosseum was inspired by Wingard's cat, Mischief, lying in her circular bed.

ALL YOU NEED IS DEATH

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 19 APRIL

15 | 97 minutes

Director **Paul Duane**

Cast **Simone Collins, Charlie Maher, Nigel O'Neill**

This eerie Irish horror taps into the spookiness inherent in folk music, following a couple who belong to a subculture of people who hunt down old songs. Anna (Simone Collins) and Aleks (Charlie Maher) surreptitiously record private performances and sell them to a collector; the more obscure the music, the greater its value.

Following a lead to an old woman's house, they're treated to an ancient ballad in Old Irish about a King, the woman who cheated on him, and a terrible punishment. This doesn't end well for anyone involved...

A cursed song makes for an intriguing premise, and the film has bags of atmosphere, a poetic turn of phrase, and an unsettling backdrop of drones, skittering percussion and incontinent strings (the work of a member of avant-folk band Lankum). It's visually appealing too, though writer/director Paul Duane – better known as a documentarian – displays such fondness for ominous low-angle views that you start to wonder how much of the shoot he spent lying flat on the floor.

Ultimately it proves rather too mystifying, though. The film fails (or chooses) to lay out its mythology clearly – something not helped by much muttered dialogue (often in thick accents). This one may be more fully apprehensible on Blu-ray, with the subtitles turned on. **Ian Berriman**

"Hello? I have those carpet samples you wanted..."

THE FIRST OMEN

Spawn again

★★½☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 119 minutes

Director **Arkasha Stevenson**

Cast **Nell Tiger Free, Bill Nighy, Sonia Braga, Ralph Ineson**

How did *The Omen*'s Damien get born? That's the pregnant premise in this belated prequel to Richard Donner's 1976 classic, a Rome-set chiller of moderate effectiveness which nimbly avoids the car crash that was John Moore's woeful 2006 remake, only to pile headlong into unavoidable comparisons with *Immaculate*.

In that film, Sydney Sweeney stars as a young American nun who travels to Italy, only to have her womb co-opted by a malevolent Catholic cabal.

That's pretty much what happens to *The First Omen*'s Margaret (Nell Tiger Free) too, a naïve novitiate from Massachusetts who comes to suspect that the priests at the orphanage she's gone to work at have evil designs on one of her charges (Nicole Sorace).

Connective tissue with the original comes via some gorily inventive deaths, a photo of Gregory Peck, and *The Witch*'s Ralph Ineson stepping into Patrick Troughton's shoes as the doom-mongering Father Brennan.

For all its fidelity, though, Arkasha Stevenson's film winds up bearing more of a resemblance to one of the *Conjuring* Universe's various wimple-wearing spin-offs, thanks in part to a sinister sister (Sonia Braga) even Valak the demon nun would steer clear of.

Neil Smith

i Bill Nighy, who plays Vatican grandee Cardinal Lawrence in the film, once considered a life in the priesthood.

CIVIL WAR

Hate thy neighbour

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

12A | 109 minutes

Director **Alex Garland**

Cast **Kirsten Dunst, Wagner Moura, Cailee Spaeny, Stephen McKinley Henderson**

There is nothing particularly civil about the conflict that divides America in Alex Garland's latest, a hard-hitting exercise in provocative make-believe revolving around an unsettlingly plausible diegesis. What if, at a time not too distant from our own, the despicable deeds of an authoritarian president were to prompt two of the nation's largest states to secede?

That much has already happened by the time *Civil War* begins, putting the audience as much in the crosshairs as the four journalists it follows as they attempt to reach Washington before the "Western Forces" marching towards it can bring the capital to its knees.

Photographer Lee (Kirsten Dunst), reporter Joel (Wagner Moura) and seen-it-all old-timer Sammy (Stephen McKinley Henderson) have no factional skin in this game. They are only here to document, an occupation that allows them (and us) to experience a diverse array of incidents on their journey across the US.

Some episodes, like an encounter with a couple of sharpshooters pinned down by a sniper, are breathlessly tense. Others are incongruously comic, like a stop-off in a town that's blissfully going about its everyday business while the world beyond it burns.

Not everyone will be around to witness the climactic assault on a beleaguered White House that gives Garland's film its jaw-dropping, cinema-quaking finale. What's beyond question is that the naïve, Lee-idolising Jessie (Cailee Spaeny) will be an apprentice photojournalist no more, *Civil War* being as much about her personal rite of passage as it is concerned with a country ripping itself apart. "What kind of American are you?" inquires a gun-toting Jesse Plemons during one of the story's most terrifying stand-offs. Garland might be no American at all, yet he has nevertheless imagined a doomsday future for Uncle Sam that feels uncomfortably close to his present. **Neil Smith**

"Can they not see that we've got a high-vis tabard?!"

i Garland regular Sonoya Mizuno, previously seen in *Ex Machina* and *Devs*, pops up as an embedded war correspondent.

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MAGICAL NEGROES

★★★½☆

RELEASED 26 APRIL
12A | 105 minutes
Director **Kobi Libii**
Cast **Justice Smith, David Alan Grier, An-Li Bogan, Nicole Byer**

Spike Lee coined the term "magical negro" to describe black supporting characters in films like *The Green Mile*, *Ghost* and *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, who use their powers in aid of white protagonists. In Kobi Libii's directorial debut, he satirises this stock type and creates the titular society, which is devoted to using its magic in service of "white comfort" – believing that it ultimately makes the black population safer.

After being inducted into the order, young sculptor Aren (Justice Smith) is mentored by Roger (David Alan Grier) and tasked with infiltrating a tech company called Meetbox where mediocre white men fail upwards. One of the sacred tenets of the society is to always prioritise white people over yourself, something that becomes increasingly difficult when Aren finds himself in a love triangle with a white co-worker.

The script is sharp, the satire is salient and the comedic pairing of Smith and Grier is delightful. Unfortunately, the central love story falls a little flat; there are myriad bland "budding romance" scenes. And Nicole Byer goes criminally underused as the society's head. Ironically given the title, the supporting black characters deserved better. **Leila Latif**

BOY KILLS WORLD

★★★★☆

RELEASED 26 APRIL
18 | 110 minutes
Director **Moritz Mohr**
Cast **Bill Skarsgård, Sharlto Copley, Michelle Dockery, Jessica Rothe**

If Marvel ever find themselves scrambling around for a director for *Deadpool 4*, they could look no further than Moritz Mohr. His first feature after a series of attention-grabbing shorts, *Boy Kills World* is a virtual audition piece for the MCU.

Set in a dystopian future, it centres on an unnamed deaf and dumb man (Bill Skarsgård) who, after his family's killed, is trained by a mysterious mentor to exact revenge on the tyrannical Hilda van der Koy (Famke Janssen). This involves picking off various members of her odious family until he gets to the murderous head honcho.

That all sounds simple enough, but the movie is a demented mix of ideas and tone, swinging wildly from glib comedy to sober sincerity even within scenes. Though its protagonist doesn't speak, we do hear his inner thoughts, in a throaty voice he remembers from an arcade game.

It's a film that revels in its madness, from the orgy of head-splitting violence that takes place on the set of a TV show, with characters dressed as snowmen, goats and pirates, to the Man's cliché-ridden narration ("The people live in fear – that's the city that Hilda created. That's how it's going to stay until *I kill her*.")

Love or loathe it (there'll be no-one in the middle), *Boy Kills World* is unlike anything else you'll see this year. Apart from *Deadpool 3*, maybe. **Steve O'Brien**

TIGER STRIPES

★★★★☆

RELEASED 3 MAY
TBC | 95 minutes
Director **Amanda Nell Eu**
Cast **Zafreen Zairizal, Deena Ezral Fatimah Abu Bakar, Shaheizy Sam**

Coming of age as a girl is pretty much a horror show, even if nothing supernatural happens to you. But much as in Brian De Palma's *Carrie*, Diablo Cody's *Jennifer's Body* or Julia Ducournau's *Raw*, in *Tiger Stripes* a protagonist's monstrosity feels like a righteous and empowering reaction to the cruel patriarchal world these women inhabit.

It's set in a conservative girls' school in Malaysia, where young women are indoctrinated with regressive gender norms, and the charming, free-spirited, TikTok-loving Zaffran (Zafreen Zairizal) is viewed as disobedient and transgressive.

As puberty kicks in, she at first goes through the expected bodily transitions and grapples with the stigma around periods which her classmates claim make her "dirty". But more seismic shifts lie ahead of her, and Zaffran's inner tiger comes to the fore.

While the film follows the regular beats of monstrous coming-of-age tales, body-horror moments that would make Cronenberg wince, infectious joy in the performances of the young cast and exuberant direction all help to make *Tiger Stripes* feel fresh and vital.

Amanda Nell Eu's feature debut distinguishes her as a thrilling new talent – even if it's a sad reminder that being a teenage girl hasn't become any better over the years. **Leila Latif**

IMAGINARY

★★☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
15 | 104 minutes
Director **Jeff Wadlow**
Cast **DeWanda Wise, Pyper Braun, Taegen Burns, Betty Buckley**

Imaginary friends are looking set to supersede scary dolls this year, given the presence of both this new horror title and John Krasinski's kid-friendlier *IF*. But *Imaginary*, which bears the Blumhouse moniker (and features a scare bear) falls far short of the campy fun of *M3GAN* and its like.

It's the tortured tale of a woman (DeWanda Wise's Jessica) moving back to her childhood home with stepfamily in tow: a forgettable hubby, soon-to-be-influenced younger girl and bratty teen older girl. She discovers, however, that something she left behind as a kid has been waiting for her.

The film soon stumbles, weighed down with exposition and predictable jump scares. One highlight is Pyper Braun as young Alice, who gives good scary voice energy when having a conversation with Chauncey, the bear that represents her newfound "playmate". But otherwise it's far less than the sum of its parts.

A muddy, rushed finale doesn't help matters, set in a rip-off MC Escher-style world of twisted corridors and doors leading to alternate worlds. A repeated refrain of the movie is the phrase "never ever", and that could easily apply to seeing this in cinemas as opposed to waiting for streaming. Perhaps not as bad as you imagine, but nowhere near as good as you might hope. **James White**

DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

- **Before a fight, Nell swallows her pixie friend as a choir starts screeching.**
- **Adrian Lester's villainous Earl of Poynton performs an evil spell.**

- **We see a poster offering a reward for the capture of Nelly Jackson.**
- **Billy Blind warns Nell about something... but she just ignores him.**
- **Roxy sees something supernatural.**
- **Nell puts on an accent (bonus shot if you hear Harland's native Irish).**

RENEGADE NELL Series One

Outstanding, delivered

★★★★½

UK/US **Disney+, streaming now**

Creator **Sally Wainwright**

Cast **Louisa Harland, Bo Bragason, Florence Keen, Adrian Lester**

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **Highway robbery** is clearly the new "wait ages for a bus, then two come at once". On 1 March *The Completely Made-Up Adventures Of Dick Turpin* landed on Apple TV+: a tongue-in-cheek take on the British highwayman starring *GBBO* host Noel Fielding. Then at the end of the month, Disney+ released the slightly more serious *Renegade Nell*, this time telling the story of a mythical highwaywoman robbing carriages.

Renegade Nell is easily the superior of the two. It also slots firmly into the pages of *SFX*, thanks to its flaunting of witchcraft, folklore and, in one stirring sequence, a deadly Herne the Hunter. It's hardly what you'd expect from the pen of Sally Wainwright, the national treasure responsible for *Last Tango In Halifax*, *Happy Valley* and *Gentleman Jack*, although Wainwright's penchant for writing fabulous female leads remains comfortingly in place.

And her Nelly Jackson lands with a bang. Played by Louisa Harland – a billion miles away from her role as the loopy Orla in *Derry Girls* – she's just returned from war as a widow, inexplicably accompanied by a tiny flying pixie named Billy Blind (Nick Mohammed). Whenever Nell is threatened, Billy flies into her mouth and gives her superpowers, usually to beat up arseholes.

Which is handy, given that her home village of Tottenham is being terrorised by the prince of arseholes, Thomas (Jake Dunn), the drunken son of a local magistrate. He tries to give her a thrashing and receives an ass-whupping in return; in retaliation, Thomas kills Nell's father. As events escalate, Nell goes on the run with her sisters Roxy (Bo Bragason) and George (Florence Keen), eventually teaming up with foppish highwayman Isambard Tulley (Frank Dillane).

Harland is *phenomenal* as Nell. She's off-the-charts charismatic, hilarious when she needs to be, and delivers a performance as grounded in reality as one you'd find in a Mike Leigh drama. Her fight scenes – always accompanied by a cheerful operatic chorus – are inventively choreographed and flaunt an endearing cheekiness. The show never forgets that it wants to entertain: whether that's through its boo-hiss villains; its skewering of mannered Stuart-era society; or even, incredibly, an audacious *Oliver!*-style dance.

Over the eight-episode run, there are only two missteps. The first is a fumbled subplot about a troupe of travelling actors; the second is that Nell's relationship with her pixie friend isn't really developed. These are more than made up for, however, by the sight of her walloping bad 'uns in action sequences that are as cathartic as they are exhilarating. Noel Fielding's Dick may be the leading dandy highwayman on Apple TV+, but Nell's the winner of this *Bake Off* challenge. **Jayne Nelson**

i Harland didn't need a coach for her Cockney accent; her Stepney-born boyfriend sent her voice notes.

HALO Season Two
Taken At The Flood

★★★★☆

UK/US **Paramount+, streaming now**
Director **David Wiener**
Cast **Pablo Schreiber, Kate Kennedy, Natascha McElhone, Joseph Morgan**

The videogame-inspired space opera welcomes a new showrunner in the shape of David Wiener, and a swathe of positive changes with him.

There's more action and plot development, leading to a finale that reveals a ton of lore and prophesies a tonally different season three, should one be greenlit. We finally see the parasitic Flood!

Meanwhile, the war with the Covenant continues, and we explore the origins of the Spartan super soldiers. Admiral Paragonsky becomes delightfully unhinged, Laera goes from barely-there to badass, and we have a new anti-hero in the form of Colonel Ackerson: a scene-stealing turn from Joseph Morgan, playing a character from the *Halo* tie-in novels.

Less positively, exterior sequences with the Spartans have that fragile, clumsy quality of old-school videogame cut-scenes. Allegedly, it was for financial reasons that the canonically significant fall of planet Reach is rushed through in just one episode, too.

If true, then where exactly did the multimillion dollar budget go? For example: our heroes' armour is confiscated, so Master Chief and pals spend a lot of time in civvies (which at least makes everything look less phoney).

> **"Halo has emerged as both earnest and thrill-packed"**

There's a welcome authenticity about the main Spartans. The actors, led by an outspoken Pablo Schreiber, do a solid job of bringing empathy and vulnerability to these potentially nondescript warriors, to the point that when Master Chief throws a punch, it's almost a shock.

"Hey Cortana, open Windows Explorer for me."

Halo doesn't have the cerebral vision of *Foundation*, and it never feels like each story strand gets enough time. But it fills the gap left by *The Expanse* and has emerged as both earnest and thrill-packed, with season two improving on its first outing.

Dave Bradley

i Keep 'em peeled during the scene in an antiques shop in episode four – an original Xbox can be seen on a shelf.

PASSENGER Series One
Village Of The Damned Strange

★★★★☆

UK **ITVX, streaming now**
US **Britbox, streaming now**
Creator **Andrew Buchan**
Cast **Wunmi Mosaku, Arian Nik, Rowan Robinson, David Threlfall**

EPISODES 1.01-1.06 **Gloriously** unpigeonholeable, *Passenger* must have been the marketing team at ITV's worst fear. Which is kind of fitting considering that worst fears are at the heart of this show.

At times it's a gritty, Northern *Happy Valley*-style detective show, delving into the dark underbelly of a small rural village. But then there's some *The Wicker Man*-style folk horror oddness involving a mystical tree.

It also throws in some *Stranger Things*-style weirdness going on in the local factory, complete with *Predator*-style sound effects, and the odd *Fargo*-style local cop duo, complete with trapper hats and Scandi noir jumpers. Not to mention a bunch of characters who channel everything from Mike Leigh-esque social realism to *This Country* whimsy. There's even a bread factory boss who clearly shares some DNA with Brian Potter (wonder what his view on garlic bread is?).

Add to the list a dodgy videogame, vanishing teenagers, a "best kept village" competition, some frakking, a big city cop who rubs the locals up the wrong way and secret backstories galore, and the result is something brilliantly weird. Not *Twin Peaks* weird, but endearingly odd in a very British way.

Sure, it's rambling. By the end of episode five it seems no nearer actually getting anywhere than it did at the end of episode one. Sure, *Happy Valley* fans are going to baulk at the weirdness, and science fiction/fantasy fans are going to wonder why all these, yuck, personal tales are getting in the way of the big mystery. Sure, some of the characters don't really develop a personality until very late on. And sure, the ending is frustrating, because you can't be certain that something this bizarre will get commissioned for a second season.

"I got the scarf from some bloke in a blue box."

But somehow, despite ultimately being less than the sum of its parts, *Passenger* works. It works because it believes that it can juggle all of these genre balls, and you end up believing it too – and are happy to look away when it drops them.

Dave Golder

i Director Lee Haven Jones also helmed *Doctor Who*s "Spyfall, Part 2", "Orphan 55" and "Revolution Of The Daleks".

SUGAR Season One
The Human Jungle

★★★★★

- UK/US **Apple TV+, Fridays, streaming now**
- Creator **Mark Protosevich**
- Cast **Colin Farrell, Kirby, Amy Ryan, Dennis Boutsikaris, Nate Corddry**

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **There's a chance** that any *SFX* reader watching *Sugar* on our recommendation could get four or five episodes in and throw in the towel. The brainchild of screenwriter Mark Protosevich, whose credits include *The Cell*, *I Am Legend* and *Thor*, the series initially presents itself as a straight neo-noir thriller.

So without wishing to ruin a delightful surprise, we'll say this: hang on in there, because a twist is coming – one as audacious, in its way, as the entirely different rug-pull in *Angel Heart*.

Not that you wouldn't get any indication that *something* is afoot. When it comes to the main character, John Sugar (Colin Farrell), a nagging feeling soon grows that perhaps he's a bit too good to be true.

Not only does this LA private dick dress immaculately in Savile Row suits, cruise around in a vintage car, and speak everything from Spanish to Arabic, but his moral code seems pretty saintly, extending way beyond basic decency. Early on, he takes a sincere interest in a homeless man's predicament, offering to pay for a flight to visit a family member. Can such a knight in shining armour really exist?

Sugar is a keen cinephile too – even subscribing to *Sight And Sound*! The series' format reflects this, intercutting his investigations with brief snippets from old movies, from well-known titles like *Sunset Boulevard* and *Vertigo* to more obscure ones such as *The Strange Love Of Martha Ivers*.

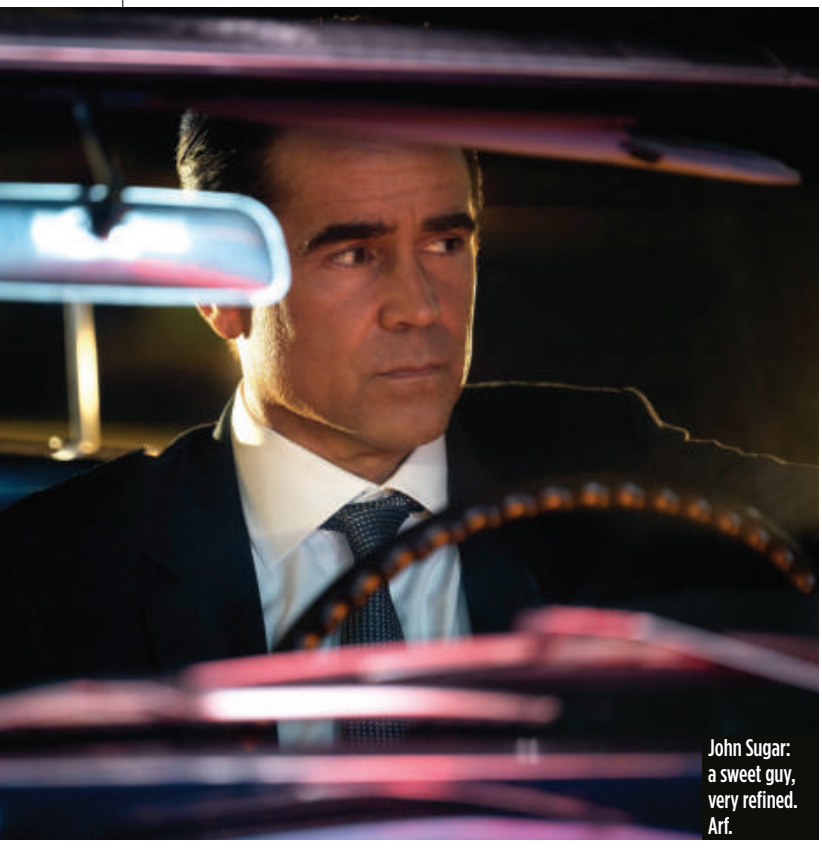
SFX Loves ★★★★★

This dense metafictionality is not only a treat for similarly movie-mad viewers, who'll enjoy playing name that clip, but insinuates a vague sense that perhaps the reality being presented here is in some way or another just a studio-backlot facade itself.

Eventually such bubbling suspicions turn out to be well-founded. While that astonishing late-stage pivot is fascinatingly transformative, *Sugar* is compelling in its early stages too. The series makes use of the noir trope of voiceover narration, and Sugar's basic mission – find a young woman who's gone missing, on behalf of her Hollywood producer grandfather – could have been torn from the pages of a Raymond Chandler novel. However, the territory it takes us into (an often morally grey world of Hollywood high-rollers) feels very modern, encompassing #MeToo, Instagram reels, human traffickers, and other contemporary bogeymen a world away from coin-tossing gangsters.

> "Can such a knight in shining armour exist?"

Unlike many streaming series, it's not over-extended; after the opening instalment's scene-setting is concluded, the episodes average out at about 35 minutes' duration. An additional twist in the finale's closing stages (which provides a possible direction for a second season) fails to convince. But that's about the only significant failing of this slick, hip and ingeniously constructed show, which hopefully may turn on some of its audience to a string of Hollywood classics. **Ian Berriman**



John Sugar: a sweet guy, very refined. Arf.

i Other old movies glimpsed include *The Big Heat*, *Gilda*, *Johnny Guitar*, *The Killers*, *Kiss Me Deadly* and *Sweet Smell Of Success*.

WRECK Series Two

★★★☆☆

- UK **iPlayer, streaming now**
- Creator **Ryan J Brown**
- Cast **Oscar Kennedy, Thaddea Graham, Jodie Tyack, Harriet Webb**

EPISODES 2.01-2.06 **BBC Three's** horror-comedy runs aground with its second run, disembarking from the seagoing setting of the first, whose cruise ship killings were revealed as a human-hunting package offered to wealthy clients of an evil corporation.

Seven months later, after a cover-up involving huge pay-offs, survivors like Jamie (Oscar Kennedy) and Vivian (Thaddea Graham) conclude that the only way to take down Velorum is to infiltrate their latest venture: a high-end wellness festival in Slovenia.

As before, it's a series with strong LGBT representation, and a waspish tone. You can't go two minutes without hearing potty talk, with creator Ryan J Brown also tossing in phrases that in other contexts might be considered hate speech to add edge to the bantz.

There's some mildly amusing skewering of narcissistic new-age nonsense. A duck-masked Velorum henchman so hulking that he recalls Jason Voorhees adds some threat. And the body count leaves you feeling that no character is safe.

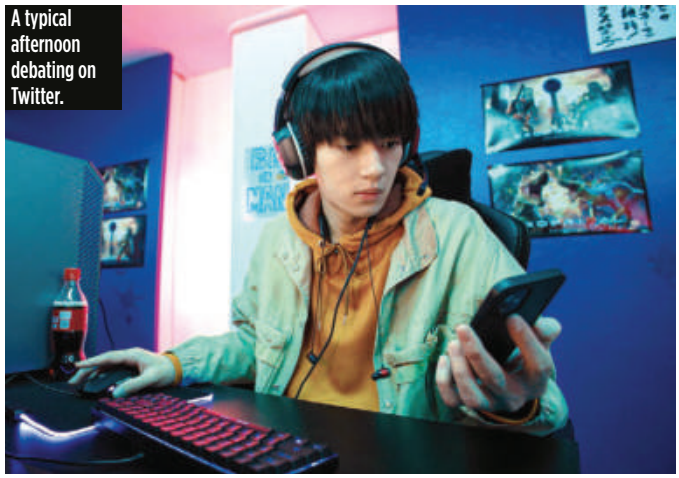
But the series struggles to find a twist which can compete with series one's – the mystery of what exactly the festival's "change-maker package" entails rather fizzles out. And its lachrymose emotionality can get tiresome. We pause for watery-eyed heart-to-hearts so often that they must have had runners standing by with sliced onions. **Calvin Baxter**

MY UNDEAD YOKAI GIRLFRIEND Season One

Crazy Like A Fox Spirit

★★★☆☆

- UK/US **Prime Video, streaming now**
- Creators **Yalun Tu, Zach Hines**
- Cast **Ai Yoshikawa, Hayato Sano, Takashi Sorimachi, Nagisa Saitō**



A typical afternoon debating on Twitter.

©2024 AMAZON CONTENT SERVICES LLC OR ITS AFFILIATES

EPISODES 1.01-1.08 **This Japanese** supernatural comedy-drama is naff in places, and nothing especially significant, but likeable all the same.

Hachi, a nerdy college student, is on the rebound from a relationship catastrophe when he hears of an occult summoning ritual. Trying it out, he conjures up a severe girl in a leather outfit, a fox spirit princess who demands instant sex. Hachi is amusingly reluctant, believing in committed relationships. Nonetheless, the deed's soon done – it's depicted tamely, but it's still a contrast with "magic girlfriend" comedy anime, whose characters would sooner die than go so far.

Now Hachi's bonded for life with the girl, Izzy, who has a centuries-old vendetta against the clans that banished her kind. She briskly beheads a college bully, storing his severed head in Hachi's fridge, and chases more victims.

The decapitation signals that this isn't quite the sitcom fluff it first seems, though the show remains fundamentally sweet. The leads are mostly functional. Ai Yoshikawa (Izzy) is single-note serious, and her fight scenes only adequate. Hayato Sano (Hachi) comes from the gurning-face school of comedy, though the character grows up a bit as his feelings clash with his ethics. Much of the emerging story is played straight, and there's some pathos as Hachi realises the hopelessness of his situation.

Other highlights worth mentioning include a troupe of loveable moaning zombies, and a worldly Buddhist priest who's jocularly menacing.

A lively climax – no pun intended – is followed by scenes which set up the possiblity of a second season.

Andrew Osmond

i Co-creator Zach Hines used to be the editor of *HK Magazine*, a new-defunct English-language weekly in Hong Kong.

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TIGON COLLECTION

Past Tensers

RELEASED OUT NOW!/ 22 APRIL
1968/1971/1971 | 15/18/15 | 4K/Blu-ray/DVD
Directors **Michael Reeves/ Piers Haggard/James Kelly**
Cast **Vincent Price, Ian Ogilvy/ Linda Hayden, Wendy Padbury/ Beryl Reid, Flora Robson**

For a short period in the late-'60s and early-'70s, producer Tony Tenser's company Tigon supplied competition for Hammer and Amicus with a string of low-budget productions. Some of them are now being revived in a new range from 88 Films.

The earliest of the so-called "Unholy Trinity" of foundational folk horror films, **Witchfinder General** ★★★★☆ is a wolf in sheep's clothing. With its period costumes and melodramatic score, at first glance it could be mistaken for a mid-period Hammer flick. Its true brutality quickly becomes apparent, however. It's 1645 and witchfinder Matthew Hopkins (Vincent Price) is terrorising East Anglia. Relentless in its sexualised violence, it's a hard film to *like*, but it is bracingly honest about the horror of unchecked misogyny and mob "justice".

The Blood On Satan's Claw ★★★★☆ is far stranger. In 18th century England a farmer finds something nasty in his fields, and the village is soon beset by a cult led by the charismatic Angel Blake (Linda Hayden). A heady mix of eerie supernatural chills and '60s paranoia (the youth cult is only a few steps away from the Manson Family), it's atmospherically realised with a few potent moments of real nastiness.

Beast In The Cellar ★★★☆☆ is a queer sort of horror: one relentlessly focused on two bickering middle-aged women. A script which you could easily see being performed as a play loads veterans Beryl Reid and Flora Robson with page upon page of dialogue as the cohabiting sisters hiding a terrible secret.

Something is tearing apart squaddies from a nearby army base. With its source clear from the outset, we wait only to learn the precise identity of the "beast". The answer is hilariously implausible, inescapably bringing *Monty Python* to mind.

The film fails to supply any scares, but if *Whatever Happened To Baby Jane?* is one of your faves then you'll probably eat up this exercise in gloomy camp.

Extras Both the UK and US versions of **Witchfinder General** ★★★★☆ are included, with the American version (titled *Conqueror Worm*) featuring more nudity and a different score; the additional scenes are also viewable separately (four minutes). There's an entertaining interview with star Ian Ogilvy (22 minutes), plus a piece on the editing (32 minutes) which talks to three of the crew.

Folk horror expert Adam Scovell discusses the film (21 minutes), and there's a lively commentary by Kim Newman and Sean Hogan. Plus: trailers.

The Blood On Satan's Claw ★★★★☆ has two commentaries: a vintage one by director Piers Haggard, Hayden and writer Robert Wynne-Simmons; and a new one by critics Vic Pratt and William Fowler. Kier-La Janisse, director of folk horror documentary *Woodlands Dark And Days Bewitched*, discusses the film's place in the canon (22 minutes). An interview with Wendy Padbury (23 minutes) touches on her ambivalent feelings about the film due to an unpleasant shooting experience. Other interviewees include: Haggard (10 minutes); Wynne-Simmons (22 minutes); actor Simon Williams (19 minutes); set dresser Milly Burns (eight minutes); sound recordist Tony Dawe (10 mins); composer Marc Wilkinson (11 minutes); dubbing mixer Graham V Hartstone (five minutes); and publicity director Tony Tweedale (seven minutes). There's also an archival interview with Tenser (27 minutes). Plus: trailers; a short clip of Williams revisiting the church location.

On **Beast In The Cellar** ★★★☆☆, an archival commentary featuring Tenser and another producer is supplemented by a new one by critics David Flint and Allan Bryce. Across four new interviews (41 minutes), we hear from the editor, the composer, two of the sound team (zzzz), and bit-part player Christopher Chittell. **Will Salmon/Ian Berriman**

Jacket five groats. Hat and gloves model's own.

> **"Supplied competition for Hammer"**

i A reluctant Flora Robson only signed up for *Beast* after Laurence Olivier advised her it was better to be working than not.

THE CAT AND THE CANARY

Triumph Of The Will

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED 22 APRIL

1927 | PG | Blu-ray

Director **Paul Leni**

Cast **Laura La Plante, Creighton Hale, Forrest Stanley, Tully Marshall**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **The first and finest** screen version of John Willard's stage play may hail from the dying days of silent cinema, but nearly a century on it's lost none of its playful gothic energy.

This stunning new restoration enhances the genius of director Paul Leni, the shadow-master of German Expressionist cinema, who balances farce and horror as claimants gather at a "grotesque mansion" to squabble over a millionaire's will.

It's deliciously creaky, tropey stuff, complete with hairy hands emerging from the dark, but there are flashes of genuine surrealism amid the moths and cobwebs. It's striking how artfully the camera prowls the corridors, producing modern-feeling tracking shots delightfully unencumbered by the need for heavy audio-recording equipment. Some argue the advent of sound put the evolution of cinema back by years. Watching this you might just believe it.

Extras This Eureka release offers a choice of illuminating commentaries by dependable horror mavens: Kim Newman paired with Stephen Jones, plus Kevin Lyons alongside Jonathan Rigby. A fascinating video essay frames the film against the history of the Old Dark House genre, and proves a sobering reminder of just how many glorious-sounding early movies are now lost to the great exit light in the sky (29 minutes).

> **"Enhances the genius of director Paul Leni"**

Film critics Pamela Hutchinson (13 minutes) and Phuong Le (nine minutes) provide a pair of perceptive appreciations. There are also newly dramatised audio extracts from Willard's original play (five minutes), as well as Paul Leni's endorsement of Lucky Strike cigarettes (one minute), plus a booklet. **Nick Setchfield**

"Get that cat away from that canary, quick!"

i The sets were by Charles D Hall, who went on to design *Dracula*, *Frankenstein* and *The Bride Of Frankenstein*.

THE BORDERLANDS

What Lies Beneath

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2014 | 15 | Blu-ray

Director **Elliot Goldner**

Cast **Gordon Kennedy, Robin Hill, Aidan McArdle, Luke Neal**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **You'd be forgiven** for skipping this British horror when it debuted. Not only was it a found-footage film emerging when enthusiasm for the genre had all but burned out, but it was saddled with a bland title and a clichéd poster (a *Cabin In The Woods*-riffing Rubik's Cube church.)

A decade on, *The Borderlands* has acquired a cult following, with good reason. For starters, it's a rare found footage film with bullet-proof reasoning behind the conceit, centred on a team of Vatican investigators as they look into strange events in a recently reopened church. All three wear headcams to document the process, and key locations are fitted with CCTV.

Like the best found-footage films, it manages to raise the hairs on the back of your neck using very little: sinister creaks and rumblings; ominous video glitches; indistinct forms in the dark.

In large part the product of improvising around the script, the central relationship between world-weary priest Deacon (*Absolutely*'s Gordon Kennedy) and tech geezer Gray (Robin Hill – also the editor on Ben Wheatley films like *Kill List*) adds plenty of verisimilitude, thanks to the latter's inane conversational style.

The increasingly claustrophobic finale climaxes in a manner that lingers unpleasantly in the mind. Just try your best to put aside the idea that this might all be taking place in Stoneybridge...

Poundland's clothes catalogue was not a success.

Extras The great thing about this Second Sight package is how little the bonuses overlap. Kennedy and Hill team up again in a good-humoured interview (30 minutes), shot in a church used as a location. Producer Jennifer Handorf (30 minutes) proves to be a mine of interesting information. Effects guy Dan Martin (16 minutes) presents a surprisingly absorbing show-and-tell on movie slime (maybe the first ever bonus to mention bovine obstetrics lubricant). All four are brought together for a chatty, pleasingly scene-specific commentary. Plus: an archival featurette (32 minutes). The Limited Edition release adds a 70-page booklet and six art cards. **Ian Berriman**

i The climax was shot in Chislehurst Caves in Kent – a location also used in *Inseminoid* and 1972 *Doctor Who* story "The Mutants".

"Noise-cancelling? Oh my god, that is *so hot*."

THE GREATEST HITS

Stuck records

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2024 | PG-13 | SVOD

Director **Ned Benson**

Cast **Lucy Boynton, Justin H Min, David Corenswet, Austin Crute**

DISNEY+ **Some people time travel** using an old Police Box or a DeLorean. Lucy Boynton's Harriet, though, simply listens to a song that reminds her of her dead boyfriend. One moment she'll be sitting in front of her record player; the next, she'll be back in the past in the arms of the hunky Max (David Corenswet). Although, frustratingly, she can't seem to prevent the car crash that killed him.

With her life on hold in the present day as she keeps jaunting back in time, Harriet is reluctant at first to get involved with fellow music-lover David (*The Umbrella Academy*'s Justin Min). Can their growing attraction compete with the dear-departed Max's memory? Have a guess.

The sci-fi elements here aren't really that important; this mainly functions as a bittersweet romance. Quite honestly it verges on being a bit of a yawn-fest, but for the efforts of its cast: Corenswet is charm personified, which bodes well for the actor's new gig as Superman; Min is wonderfully warm and funny; Boynton leavens her character's understandable grief with flashes of welcome humour.

As a love story this is cute enough, although it lacks any real emotional wallop. As a time travel film? Stick to the classics.

Meg Wilde

i Boynton and Corenswet had one scene together in TV series *The Politician*. He played her boyfriend in that too.

RESTORE POINT

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2023 | 15 | Download

An ingenious premise drives this Czech thriller: in a world heading for dystopia, people have the means to resurrect themselves in the event of unnatural death, using laptop-like restore points.

It plays like a twisty, near-future Scandi noir, with a jagged turn by Andrea Mohylová as the detective pursuing a series of killings linked to the tech. And it gets good value out of its provocative high-concept: in a sly touch, a murder victim joins the investigation into their own death. **Nick Setchfield**

WITCH

★★★☆☆

RELEASED 29 APRIL

2024 | N/A | Download

Set in 1585, this indie horror finds a blacksmith's wife accused of witchcraft, along with a local girl who has slain her own parents and paraded their heads in the street. No wonder the town's known as the Devil's Door...

While the dialogue can feel jarringly anachronistic, this modest production makes effective, extensive use of locations to conjure 16th century grime and gloom. It's sincerely played by the cast, and an unexpected plot wrinkle adds intrigue to the familiar folk horror beats. **Nick Setchfield**

TIL DEATH DO US PART

★☆☆☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

2023 | 15 | Download

Staring down the barrel of a lifetime commitment, a bride-to-be flees her wedding... only to be stalked by the best man and other groomsmen, who are determined not to let her escape.

This low-budget thriller should be fun, but because it thinks it's a mystery, it won't commit to any of its characters or storylines, so it's a soupy nonsensical mess. Try drinking every time there's a pointless dance sequence; that way you might enjoy yourself. **Sarah Dobbs**

MAX BEYOND

★½☆☆☆

RELEASED 22 APRIL

2024 | 15 | Download

This testosterone-fuelled, CG-animated sci-fi thriller marries a *Blade Runner/Akira* aesthetic to a multiverse-meets-*Groundhog Day* plot for a lot of repetitive designer violence.

It's been created using Unreal Engine, the system behind things like *Fortnite*, but this is nothing to boast about. The animation looks like a cheap videogame (in-play visuals that is, not cut scenes) and the plot feels like playing the same level over and over. Unsurprisingly, there's a spin-off game coming next year.

Dave Golder

MANSION OF THE DOOMED

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

RELEASED 6 MAY
1976 | 15 | Blu-ray
Director **Michael Pataki**
Cast **Richard Basehart, Gloria Grahame, Trish Stewart**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **101 Films' latest** Black Label release revives B-movie producer Charles Band's first horror. It takes its cue from *Eyes Without A Face*. In George Franju's 1960 classic, a surgeon kidnaps young women, slicing their faces off to restore his disfigured daughter's looks. *Mansion Of The Doomed* is more *A Face Without Eyes*, as Richard Basehart's similarly situated Dr Chaney harvests eyeballs for a series of unsuccessful transplants.

A film of threadbare logic, it throws viewers in the deep end with indecent haste, and (after parading some real-life surgical footage) quickly loses interest in the operations themselves. The focus is more on the aftermath, as a cage gradually fills with blinded donors (including a handsome young Lance Henriksen).

Their nightmarish existence is hauntingly grim, but even effects legend Stan Winston struggles to find a convincing way of faking hollowed-out eye sockets, forced to build up the actors' faces. Result: the victims all look strangely neanderthal.

Extras A 33-minute featurette interviews the producer, with ex-*Fangoria* editor Chris Alexander popping up periodically to blow smoke... Editor Harry Keramidas (17 minutes) has few insights, beyond his rule when working for Band: insist on payment in cash! Plus: booklet. **Ian Berriman**

JEAN ROLLIN

Fantastique Voyages

RELEASED 22 APRIL
1970/1974 | 18 | 4K/Blu-ray
Cast **Caroline Cartier, Olivier Martin, Maurice Lemaître/Joëlle Coeur, Lieva Lone, Patricia Hermenier**

Indicator's range of Jean Rollin restorations marches on, with a pair of titles that demonstrate both the captivating and frustrating aspects of the cult French filmmaker's oeuvre.

An exercise in poetic mystery, **The Nude Vampire** ★★★★★ has some entrancing sequences. A man encounters a woman clad only in diaphanous fabric, pursued at night by animal-masked figures. Later, he sneaks into a black-tie gathering, but finds he's stumbled upon a suicide cult. Both are pure cinema, liberated from dialogue.

Turns out the girl's one of a breed of "mutants" whose immortality is a sought-after commodity. But such exposition is hurriedly tossed off – Rollin was more interested in beguiling imagery than plot. On that level the film's a triumph, shrugging off narrative logic with panache.

Attempts to do likewise on **The Demoniacs** ★★★☆☆ end up feeling messily absurd. It centres on four "wreckers" who lure a ship onto the rocks, then murder two female survivors. With the victims somehow revived, it seems a rape-revenge tale is in store – but revenge never quite materialises.

The acting is melodramatic; the story so arbitrary it might have been workshopped by small children: "Then a clown takes them to a demon, who gives them his special powers, and..."

Every Rollin film has something memorable, though. Here it's Joëlle Coeur's performance as a female wrecker so aroused by cruelty that she pleasures herself on a pile of seaweed. Oh là là!

Extras Film historians Kevin Lyons and Jonathan Rigby supply commentary on **The Nude Vampire** ★★★½☆. Virginie Sélavy adds a concise overview (10 minutes). A five-minute talking head maps Rollin's links with the anarchist movement. "Fragment d'un Dialogue" (19 minutes) cuts together bits of old interviews with the late director, who discusses influences like painter Paul Delvaux, and rejects political readings of his work. A "making of" drawing on three interviews of similar vintage (nine minutes) hardly warrants the description.

The Demoniacs ★★★★☆ offers the French release (100 minutes), an export cut with two added sex scenes (109 minutes); and a US edit (86 minutes).

A reliably excellent talking head by Stephen Thrower (42 minutes) makes a strong case for the defence; he also uses the film to unpack Rollin's obsessions. *Video Watchdog*'s Tim Lucas provides commentary, and there are three archival chats: AD Jean-Pierre Bouyxou (21 minutes) recalls the studio being "basically a shed"; actors Paul Biscigilia and Willy Braque (nine/10 minutes) fondly remember Rollin. Plus: director's commentary on some scenes (29 minutes); two minutes of outtakes.

Both films also come with short introductions (more interview snippets really), trailers, galleries, and 80-page booklets. **Ian Berriman**

The Demoniacs: flaming ridiculous.

> "Demonstrate both captivating and frustrating aspects"

i With a week to go on *The Demoniacs*, they ran out of money. Then a producer won 100,000 francs on a lottery ticket. Jammy!

ALL THAT MONEY CAN BUY

Faust amendment

★★★★☆ EXTRAS ★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1941 | PG | Blu-ray

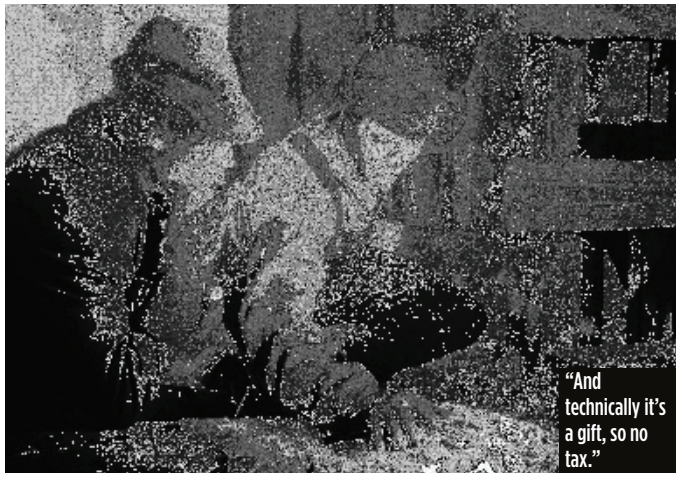
Director **William Dieterle**

Cast **Edward Arnold, Walter Huston, James Craig, Anne Shirley**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Adapting Stephen** Vincent Benét's short story "The Devil And Daniel Webster" – a title the film took back when edited down for rerelease – this turns the Faustian legend into a piece of magical Americana, as a noble politician steps in to save a New Hampshire farmer from a diabolical pact.

Rod Serling was taking notes: you can see the clear influence on the folksier episodes of *The Twilight Zone*. The piety and patriotism may feel a little stuffy nowadays, but Walter Huston's Oscar-nominated turn as the Mephistophelian Mr Scratch remains electrifying. All psycho-pixie grin and sulphurous mischief, he's proof that if the Devil has all the best tunes he's staked a pretty persuasive claim on the best parts, too.

⊕ **Extras** Film historian Bruce Eder and composer Bernard Herrmann's biographer Steven C Smith provide an informative commentary. A comparison between the 1941 preview print version – titled *Here Is A Man* – and the 1943 rerelease (five minutes) is accompanied by a dry but insightful look at the film's editing (13 minutes).



A featurette on the impressive restoration job (six minutes) has the bonus of revealing the chillingly Satanic lyrics to the seemingly innocuous French lullaby sung by Simone Simon.

There are also original 1930s radio adaptations of "The Devil And Daniel Webster" and sister tale "Daniel Webster And The Sea Serpent" (30 minutes apiece) – both featuring Herrmann's music – while Alec Baldwin delivers an evocative reading of the short story (from 2003, 34 minutes).

Plus: trailer; a booklet containing a 1941 article by Vincent Benét and an essay by novelist Tom Piazza.

Nick Setchfield

i Director William Dieterle also appeared as an actor in FW Murnau's 1926 silent film version of *Faust*, playing Valentin.

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

Catching some Rays

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

1980 | PG | Blu-ray

Director **Michael Anderson**

Cast **Rock Hudson, Gayle Hunnicutt, Darren McGavin, Roddy McDowall**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **Scrambling to join** the SF gold rush of the late '70s, American TV turned to the works of Ray Bradbury. Hyped at the time as event television, this three-part miniseries came loaded with promise: directed by Michael Anderson (*The Dam Busters*, *Logan's Run*), adapted by genre legend Richard Matheson, and packed with bankable small-screen faces.

Bradbury's novel is really a patchwork of vaguely connected short stories. The TV version honours that framework but such fidelity makes for disjointed viewing, however hard it tries to stitch together the assorted vignettes via random appearances by Rock Hudson's thuddingly dull spaceman character.

While the Martian designs have an eerie beauty, elegant and sinister in equal measure, much of the model and matte work seems shockingly poor in the aftermath of *Star Wars*. There are moments when this earnest, flatly-directed potboiler captures a little of that *Twilight Zone* shiver. But it fails to translate Bradbury's rich, elegiac prose into a compelling watch.

⊕ **Extras** A new set of interviews with behind-the-scenes talent prises out some satisfyingly candid reminiscences. Richard Harvey (30 minutes) reflects on the score – "A lot of it is pretty schlock", he admits – while make-up artist Colin Arthur (nine minutes) goes into eye-watering detail about the fitting of the gold-plated Martian contact lenses... and frustratingly less detail about "extraordinary kinky parties" on location. Elsewhere sculptor Brian Muir (11 minutes) discusses his striking work on the Martian landscapes, while script supervisor Cheryl Leigh (30 minutes) revisits a traumatic on-set incident involving a gun. She chooses not to name the cast member involved, but the choice of clip rather points the finger... **Nick Setchfield**

i The book's first UK publication was titled *The Silver Locusts* (a phrase used in one chapter to describe earthbound rockets).

NOW ON DIGITAL FORMATS ***Late Night With The Devil*** (Shudder, 19 April) • ***Madame Web*** • ***Out Of Darkness*** • ***Raging Grace***

A BLADE IN THE DARK

★★½☆☆ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**

1983 | 18 | 4K/Blu-ray

Director **Lamberto Bava**

Cast **Andrea Occhipinti, Anny Papa, Fabiola Toledo, Michele Soavi**

A giallo/slasher hybrid so bare-bones it's skeletal, this second feature by Lamberto Bava (son of Mario) follows a composer who, while working on a horror movie at a remote villa, finds scares intruding into real life as various female visitors are hacked up.

The film industry milieu supplies added interest for cinephiles, and the fact that the kills use tools of the trade is a neat touch: several involve an editor's blade; another is strangulation by celluloid!

However, the characters are paper thin, the setting is bland, and there's little intrigue – you are basically just waiting for the reveal. A tin-eared English dub provides a little extra entertainment, replete with dialogue like "Your satisfaction is to sit like a frog in the sun."

Extras Choose a director-approved version, or a baggier TV edit; 12 minutes longer, this reflects how the project was conceived as a four-part series.

New interviews with the director, DoP, and a producer Mino Loyo (55 minutes) reveal very little. Loyo is amusingly frank though, describing Bava as having "much less talent" than his dad. Ouch.

The DoP says all the same stuff in an old interview (20 minutes); Bava's basic English makes an old Q&A (50 minutes) tough going. Plus: commentary by a trio of experts; Italian credits; trailers. **Ian Berriman**

"You ain't seen me, right? Or have you?"

FOOTPRINTS

Down the memory hole

★★★½☆ EXTRAS ★★★½☆

RELEASED **29 APRIL**

1975 | 12 | Blu-ray

Director **Luigi Bazzoni**

Cast **Florinda Bolkan, Peter McEnery, Nicoletta Elmi, Lila Kedrova**

BLU-RAY DEBUT **While it draws on** elements of both science fiction and giallo, this enigmatic Italian film may frustrate those who come to it expecting a conventional example of either genre.

Florinda Bolkan plays Alice, a translator who's bewildered to learn that she has a three-day gap in her memory. A postcard leads her to a Turkish resort, where various people recall seeing her – only then she had long red hair.

Intercut throughout are black and white sequences, featuring an astronaut abandoned on the moon, and Klaus Kinski as a scientist babbling about conditioning. Alice identifies these as memories of a film, but they're suggestive of much more – is she the subject of some sinister experiment?

The final explanation falls flat, but the journey is fascinating, thanks to the cinematography of Vittorio Storaro, a collaborator of Bernardo Bertolucci whose three Oscar wins include *Apocalypse Now*. A chillily elegant film with an eerie tone, it makes impressive use of scenic locations, replete with compositions so ravishing you could hang them on the wall.

All this is accompanied by a beautifully bleak, brooding score by Nicola Piovani. And Bolkan herself – all flared nostrils, cheekbones and ferocious eyes – has the captivating qualities of a sculpture you could stand and gaze at for a good while.

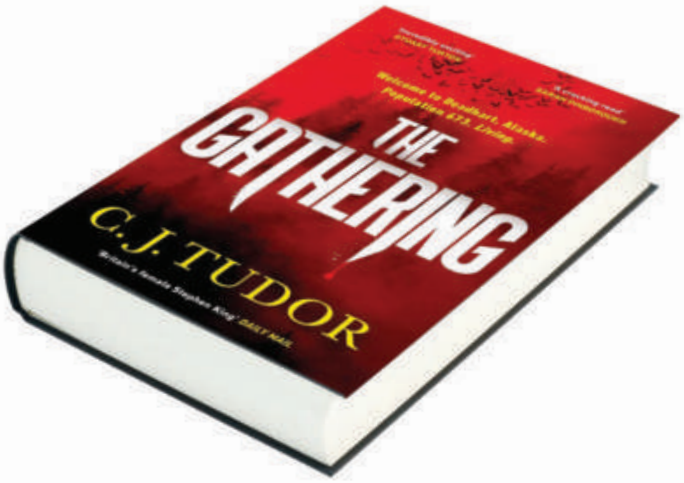
Extras This Shameless release offers three versions: a restored Director's Integral Cut with either English or Italian credits, and the US cut (two minutes shorter).

The main draw is a feature-length talking head with Storaro, which touches upon *Footprints* for about six minutes of the 78. Short interviews with Bolkan (seven minutes) and co-star Ida Galli (12 minutes) – who had just a small supporting role – don't add much. Italian cinema expert Rachael Nisbet delivers a detailed, clearly pre-scripted commentary. Plus: trailer. **Ian Berriman**

i Composer Nicola Piovani's first wife was singer Cathy Berberian, whose name inspired *Berberian Sound Studio*'s title.

ROUND UP

Time to run through recent theatrical releases hitting shiny disc. Set in 45,000 BC, **OUT OF DARKNESS** (22 April, Blu-ray), has echoes of *Prey*, following Stone Age wanderers who discover a barren realm where shrieking demons wait in the shadows. We said: "Played with absolute conviction... A bone-chiller of a campfire fable." Bonuses: nada, sadly. In **BAGHEAD** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD) a young woman inherits a pub with an entity in the basement which can shapeshift into a dead person, allowing the bereaved an audience with a lost loved one. We said: "Too much about the set-up feels arbitrary or unconvincing." Bonuses: again, nowt. In Blumhouse horror **NIGHT SWIM** (6 May/22 April, 4K/Blu-ray, DVD) a family move into a home boasting a pool with a dodgy history. We said: "Early on, it follows the predictable jump-scare route, but as the story moves on a few good ideas float to the surface." Extras? Yes! Director's commentary, and four featurettes on topics like the underwater sequences and the creatures. The big 4K release is 1986 classic **ALIENS** (22 April), one of a series of James Cameron remasters proving to be divisive; you'll either find it an improvement for the enhanced detail, or a desecration, because of the grain removal. One brand new bonus: "The Inspiration And Design Of *Aliens*" (31 minutes). The latest TV box set is **FEAR THE WALKING DEAD** Season Eight (29 April, Blu-ray/DVD); there's also a belated Blu-ray release for **STAR TREK: LOWER DECKS** Season Three (15 April).



THE GATHERING

True Detective: Bite Country

★★★★☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

416 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **CJ Tudor**

Publisher **Michael Joseph**

If you're looking for a setting that's got the icy chill of Scandi noir but none of the social democracy, Alaska could hardly be better – as demonstrated by the recent *True Detective: Night Country*. Not only is it far enough north to have (dependent on the time of year) long nights and long days, but it's also isolated, physically separated from the rest of the USA by Canada. Anchorage, Alaska's capital, was home to just 288,121 souls in 2021. More people live in Dudley.

Take all this together and it's easy to imagine all manner of horrific things happening in Alaska. Especially if, as CJ Tudor does in *The Gathering*, you add bloodsuckers to the mix – and set your story in a small-town milieu where everyone knows everyone but doesn't want to share what they know with outsiders such as Detective Barbara Atkins.

These aren't (to use Tudor's spelling) the vampyrs of other horror novels. Close to the human settlement of Deadhart, the vampyrs live in a former mining settlement, a "Colony". Humanity has learnt to get along with vampyrs, or at least to tolerate their presence. Though they are long-lived and possessed of uncanny powers, Tudor's vampyrs are essentially outcasts, on the bottom rung in a society of huge disparities, rather than coffin-dwelling manifestations of evil. Most don't drink human blood, if only because the potential consequences of doing so are dire.

But that doesn't stop humans being hugely suspicious of vampyrs, as happens in Deadhart when a teenager is discovered with his throat ripped out and the blood drained from his body. It's Atkins's job to discover what happened and, if she deems it necessary, to order a vampyr cull.

Given her role, you might expect Atkins to be an action woman. Instead, as Tudor noted when *SFX* spoke to her recently, Atkins is more like Frances McDormand's police chief Marge Gunderson in the Coen brothers film *Fargo*.

She's physically unfit but often the cleverest person in the room. One of the reasons she's such an effective investigator is that she's understated, a watcher rather than someone who rushes to action. Despite this, the pressures on Atkins to act are intense. While it's soon clear that there's more to Anderson's death than first meets the eye, this is a community with a tradition of hunting vampyrs. Moreover, vampyr relics are valuable. It's not so long since the locals routinely hung vampyr heads – hunting trophies – on their walls.

As Atkins becomes increasingly convinced that a psychopathic killer is on the loose rather than a thirsty bloodsucker, her job begins to become as much about preventing people from taking matters into their own hands as catching a killer.

Throughout, for all that this is a supernatural police procedural that takes place against the backdrop of a vast wilderness, it's the smaller, claustrophobic spaces of Deadhart that linger in the imagination – often in an unsettling way. As do the telling details: the way, for example, that corpses have to be stored in a catering fridge. And just why does the book keep cutting to scenes told from the perspective of a girl being held captive?

> **"Vampyrs are essentially outcasts, on the bottom rung"**

The characters too are vividly drawn, for all that they are often buttoned-up by small-town life. In particular, former sheriff Jenson Tucker, who is called back to duty by Atkins, is quietly fascinating, his backstory ultimately helping to explain much of what is happening in the tale.

The ending arguably leaves too many loose ends, but then again there are strong hints that further volumes featuring Atkins are planned. Let's hope that's true, because she's one of the most intriguing fictional investigators to have come along in an age.

Jonathan Wright

i In the real world, among American states, only New Mexico had a higher rate of violent crime than Alaska in 2022.

THE SILVERBLOOD PROMISE

★★★★☆

RELEASED 25 APRIL

608 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **James Logan**

Publisher **Jo Fletcher Books**

There's an Indiana Jones vibe to this fantasy. That comparison relates to its characters and plot, not its setting; forget '30s Cairo, Lukan Gardova's quest takes place in a realm reminiscent of Renaissance Italy's city states.

A roguish adventurer, Lukan blunders through encounters by luck and wit. He's the son of an antiquarian, and Dad's been murdered. Now he must unravel a conspiracy to find out what happened. His sidekick, young cutpurse Flea, is a Short Round-alike who keeps him grounded, popping up to distract villains when needed. They don disguises, sprint through catacombs and leap out of towers.

The name James Logan may be new to book shelves, but his debut arrives with the feel of somebody confident with the genre – no wonder really, given that it's a nom de plume for James Long, an editor at Orbit.

The book belongs in the modern tradition that Joe Abercrombie has made his stomping ground. It's less gritty and knowing, but there's an undercurrent of social satire.

The novel is linear, almost episodic; Lukan chases one clue after another, performing services in return for the next MacGuffin. But despite this, it has plenty of charm. While less sophisticated than the biggest genre names, it's satisfying nonetheless. **Dave Bradley**

Reviews

THE UNDERHISTORY

★★★☆☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

384 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Writer **Kaaron Warren**

Publisher **Viper Books**

Generally speaking, ghost tours aren't actively dangerous: you pay your money, you listen to the spooky stories, and you leave, pleasantly creeped out. But in *The Underhistory*, there's a tour with a difference.

Pera Sinclair, now in her sixties, was the sole survivor of a tragedy that killed her entire family when she was a child. Now she welcomes curious tourists into her home to regale them with stories of the ghosts she says lurk within. Then one day a group of dangerous escaped prisoners gatecrashes the tour...

The juxtaposition throughout of Pera's various tragedies with the horrors the prisoners have committed is chilling. It's her house, her tour, filled with her secrets, but she's also just one vulnerable woman, and the threat of violence is ever-present: one wrong word and one of the men might just snap and slit her throat. Pera becomes a kind of Australian Scheherazade, using her skill as a storyteller to manipulate the men and save her own skin.

Frustratingly, though, the promised ghost stories never quite work as well as they should, and there's no sense of a supernatural threat. It's mostly a story about a smart woman using stupid men's insecurities against them, and while that's not exactly a bad thing, it just feels like there ought to be more to it. **Sarah Dobbs**

SOMEONE YOU CAN BUILD A NEST IN

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!

320 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **John Wiswell**

Publisher **Jo Fletcher Books**

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the 2024 winner of the award for Most Literal Book Title! Shesheshen, the lead character of *Someone You Can Build A Nest In*, really *does* want to lay her offspring inside one special person. They'll then serve as both a comfy nest and, well, lunch. Romance isn't dead.

Shesheshen is a glutinous lump who can impersonate humans by absorbing them. The nearby townsfolk want her dead and, after a skirmish, Shesheshen is injured. The unsuspecting Homily finds her in human form, tends her wounds, and the two fall in love – much to the monster's surprise. But she needs to breed, and Homily looks like such a delicious baby nursery...

Deeply funny and weird, the book works as both a meditation on "otherness" and as a showcase for body horror. It doesn't always hit the spot: the final chapters feel awkwardly stapled on, while Homily isn't quite the living, breathing soul the author wants us to see on the page.

However, given that we view her entirely from the POV of a mound of goo who doesn't really understand humans, there's a good excuse for that. Despite the odds, this is a surprisingly sweet – and very gory – love story. **Jayne Nelson**

THE DANCE OF SHADOWS

★★★★☆

RELEASED 18 APRIL

560 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook

Author **Rogba Payne**

Publisher **Gollancz**

Rumi is a member of the Odu people, despised by other tribes. He lives on a continent where the Palmaine, colonisers, hold sway. But he's also a musician of rare dexterity and imagination. Could his talent offer a way out of poverty?

Yes and no. That's because, in Anglo-Nigerian author Rogba Payne's debut fantasy, which draws on West African stories, little is ever quite as it initially seems. Rumi, it's gradually revealed, can command far more power than he realises.

If, that is, he can survive the attentions of the Priest of Vultures, a macabre figure who attacks both Rumi and his family. Sanctuary lies in the Eredo, an underground city where Rumi, helped by the intervention of a dying god, trains to be a Shadowwielder, a warrior with eldritch powers.

What follows is in many respects a familiar narrative, centred on the instruction of a leader-in-waiting hiding in plain sight, but one who has yet to realise his own power – in this case, in great part that's because Rumi's own anger blocks his progress.

But the familiarity of the base plot can be largely forgiven because this is a rich, detailed and (be warned) visceral take on high fantasy that leaves you impatient for sequels. A contender for fantasy debut of the year. **Jonathan Wright**

REISSUES

Ancient myths and modern problems collide in Thomas D Lee's **PERILOUS TIMES** (★★★★½, out now, Orbit), in which an eco-warrior

accidentally unleashes a dragon by blowing up a fracking site; meanwhile, a former Knight of the Round Table is awakened from his magical slumber to answer the call to protect the realm. We said: "At once entertaining and ecologically alarming... an ambitious, imaginative debut." Justin Cronin's **THE FERRYMAN** (★★★★☆, 2 May, Orion) is set on an isolated archipelago whose islands are idyllic for a pampered elite, but far less fun for everyone else... Its protagonist's job is to shepherd people through a retirement process

which involves having their memories wiped clean and their bodies renewed before being sent back to begin life afresh. We said: "Action scenes are brilliantly executed, and a sense of menace is never far from the surface... Cronin is especially adept at balancing characterisation and plot." Finally, Nadia Attia's debut **VERGE** (★★★½☆, out now, Serpent's Tail) sees a cursed 17-year-old woman travelling north through a very disunited future UK which has reverted to superstition and intolerance, accompanied

by a young Egyptian farmhand who faces racism everywhere he goes. We said: "While the character arcs are a little predictable, Attia's world is tough and well-realised... It's an evocative setting, and the book is peppered with hints of grisly folk horror."

MAL GOES TO WAR

★★★½☆

RELEASED OUT NOW!
312 pages | Paperback/ebook
Author **Edward Ashton**
Publisher **Solaris**

Getting your novel adapted by an Oscar-winning filmmaker is the kind of attention most authors would kill for, and Edward Ashton pulled off just this trick with his previous sci-fi thriller *Mickey7* (soon to be upcoming blockbuster *Mickey17*, helmed by *Parasite*'s Bong Joon-Ho).

His latest book *Mal Goes To War* isn't connected to *Mickey7*, but it does live in the same realm of heady science fiction, just with a larger accompanying dose of dark comedy.

Set in a war-torn future America, it's the story of Mal (short for "Malware"), a free AI entity who wants nothing to do with the ongoing conflict between the genetically modded and the puritanical "Humanists".

Unfortunately, Mal then gets sealed off from the digital realm, and has to team up with a rag-tag group of freaks and runaways in order to survive the "real" world. Inventive and briskly paced, this episodic action romp pulls off some effective surprises and delivers a wide selection of enjoyable concepts relating to both AI and genetic modification.

The mix of bizarre violence and flippant humour doesn't always work, and the lack of any significant character change in the central protagonist ultimately becomes somewhat frustrating, but while flawed, this sci-fi page-turner still delivers plenty of twisted fun.

Saxon Bullock

FLOWERS FROM THE VOID

A cornucopia of despair

★★★★☆

RELEASED 2 MAY
254 pages | Hardback/ebook
Author **Gianni Washington**
Publisher **Serpent's Tail**

The world is a terrifying place, and what makes it so can be seen on the evening news. But Gianni Washington's version of the world is much more than just scary: it is queasy, disquieting and an existential hell from which its victims cannot escape.

Her debut collection of horror short stories is an uneasy proposition. They tackle grief, loneliness and unending darkness within a desolate, unsettling and truly depressing landscape. At first, her prose can seem overwrought and borders on bathos; she never selects an adjective when three metaphors could do, for instance. But this results in horrifying poetry that sees her protagonists subjected to (and subjecting others to) unspeakable cruelty.

The collection wears its influences on its sleeve, referencing horror classics like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Oscar Wilde's *A Picture Of Dorian Gray*. Subjects include reanimation, violence committed in the name of preserving eternal youth, a tale told from the perspective of the Grim Reaper, and ghosts that are unable to move on from their unfinished business. But even when covering familiar territory, Washington is able to imbue her stories with a horrible vitality and make them spiral into unprecedented hideousness.

The stories are conveyed with flowery language, which conceals their conceptual complexity. Other tales feature a young boy agreeing to be pummelled to a fleshy pulp, a mother-in-law bearing witness to a couple's consummation, and a harbinger of death revelling in the fruitless sirens of an ambulance.

They are eminently spoilable, with many not revealing their true conceit until the final act, paragraph or even sentence, but the cursed landscape of Washington's outlook permeates every sentence. This collection distinguishes her as a writer to be reckoned with and a mind to be feared. **Leila Latif**

i On 1 May, Washington will be taking part in a panel at Foyles, Charing Cross Road. For more details, visit bit.ly/washingtonpanel.

DRAGON RIDER

★★★★½

RELEASED 25 APRIL
564 pages | Hardback/ebook/ audiobook
Author **Taran Matharu**
Publisher **HarperVoyager**

Taran Matharu, author of the hugely popular Summoner series, leaves the Young Adult bracket behind with *Dragon Rider*. Early on, the shadow of *Games Of Thrones* looms large, particularly when a royal engagement party turns into a massacre, but Matharu has his own voice and ideas as a writer.

Jai is a Steppeman, handed over as hostage to the Sabine Empire in the wake of his nation's defeat. The Sabines' rise to power looks unstoppable when a marriage is arranged between the empire's prince and a princess from their northerly rivals, the dragon-riding Dansk. But a bloody coup forces Jai to flee the palace, hoping to find his way home, accompanied by a freshly hatched dragon and a Dansk handmaiden called Frida.

Matharu seems to relish the freedom of writing outside the YA box. His villains are inventively cruel, and the descriptions of torture and violence drip with blood and pain. While the prose is colourful and the worldbuilding impressive, the plotting is where Matharu really excels.

Jai grows from a bullied, timid boy into a brave, resourceful hero; however, even his most carefully laid plans invariably run awry, constantly dialling up the tension. A brutal prison sequence is particularly suspenseful. It's an exciting adventure, ripe with ideas and passion. **David West**

Reviews

CALYPSO

★★★★½

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**

224 pages | **Hardback/ebook**

Author **Oliver K Langmead**

Publisher **Titan Books**

Considered in précis form, you could be forgiven for thinking that Oliver K Langmead's *Calypso* is a slight work, even clichéd. Here is a story of a colony ship that arrives at a new world, only for it to turn out that members of the crew have ideological differences over what the future should hold for those who live on this new planet. Arguments and violence inevitably result.

But that's to overlook the form. This is a book written in verse, which nods back to days when people told epic stories in poetry. Indeed, when speaking to *SFX* this issue (see page 70), Langmead pointed out that the book is in key respects a rewrite of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

This gives *Calypso*, a book with a plot that would likely seem too science-fiction-by-numbers in prose, a freshness it would otherwise lack. It helps too that one of its four narrators, Rochelle, an engineer who awakens from cryogenic sleep to find herself at the centre of world-shaping events, is such good company.

As she navigates unfamiliar vistas, all the time thinking of her family – people who she will never see again, and probably even long dead – there's an emotional heft to the book that goes far and above most colonisation narratives.

Calypso remains, perhaps, a hard sell, but if you take a risk on just one SF book this year, make it this one.

Jonathan Wright

THE LAST PHI HUNTER

★★★★☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**

384 pages | **Paperback/ebook/audiobook**

Author **Salinee Goldenberg**

Publisher **Angry Robot**

A young male hunter, eager to prove himself, meets a beautiful woman in need of aid. Through journeying together, they both begin to recognise their feelings for the other... It's not the most original set-up for a fantasy novel, but *The Last Phi Hunter* sets it in a powerfully drawn, Asian-inspired world of magic and myth, rituals and reincarnation, bringing a freshness to the tropes that makes for a satisfying read.

Ex is a Phi Hunter, travelling the countryside killing the "hungry ghosts" that attack villagers, planning for and dreaming of the day he slays a true demon and gains respect and recognition from his guild. He's rescued from a drunken fight by Arinya, a pregnant woman on the run, who asks for escort through the forest. He knows she'll derail his plans, but can't turn down the money she's offering. Of course, things are never quite that simple...

Tropes aside, this is a cleverly told fantasy with a well-realised world of ghosts and demons, set amongst the politics of princes and power. Ex and Arinya make some frustratingly bad decisions at times, but this only makes them more real, while Narissa, a Phi seeking a second chance, is a compelling secondary character, bringing yet more shades of grey to this colourful world.

Rhian Drinkwater

THE OTHER VALLEY

★★★★½

RELEASED **18 APRIL**

305 pages | **Hardback/ebook**

Author **Scott Alexander Howard**

Publisher **Atlantic Books**

There's something comfortingly familiar about the set-up of Scott Alexander Howard's debut novel. The plot basics – a young girl in an isolated community discovers unexpected things about herself and the world – sound like the stuff of YA cliché. But while this is certainly a coming of age novel, it offers an unusual twist on time travel, while also going deeper into its themes than most.

Odile is 16 and on track to join her community's ruling Conseil. The valley she lives in is one of a succession of identical valleys that stretch to the east and the west. Head in one direction and you'll find the same town – and people – 20 years in the past. Head in the other, and you'll find them 20 years in the future.

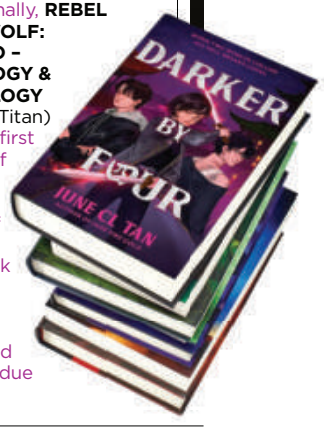
These different time zones are aware of each other, and visitors are accepted in certain circumstances. Unfortunately, an accidental glimpse at some future visitors reveals that Odile's potential new love, Edme, is doomed.

It's lyrically written by Howard, with the focus firmly on Odile's journey. The languorous pace – and a lack of quotation marks on the dialogue – may put some off, but *The Other Valley* also has a solidly gripping plot, particularly in the novel's second half, which hues darker and sadder. It's romantic, but unsentimental. A moving and quietly beautiful novel.

Will Salmon

ALSO OUT

There's plenty more books that we couldn't quite fit in. **MANIA** (out now, The Borough Press) is the latest by Lionel Shriver, author of *We Need To Talk About Kevin*. In this satirical alternate-world tale, the rise of the Mental Parity Movement has made it taboo to call someone "stupid" (that'd take all the fun out of Twitter...), and discrimination based on intelligence is viewed as a civil rights issue. One for fans of anime (and "achingly slow burn romance"), June CL Tan's YA urban fantasy **DARKER BY FOUR** (out now, Hodderscape) is set in a world of revenants, exorcists and death gods. It centres on an exorcist-in-training whose magic powers are accidentally transferred to the black sheep of an illustrious family. In Sarah Langan's near-future thriller **A BETTER WORLD** (out now, Atria), a family relocates to a walled-off company town which looks like the perfect haven from a world that's falling apart. But what exactly is "Hollow", the set of beliefs the residents follow? And what does the forthcoming Winter Festival involve? Shona Kinsella's fantasy **THE HEART OF WINTER** (16 April, Flame Tree Press) concerns a young woman called Brigit; faced with a forced marriage to Aengus, god of Summer, she flees into the Highlands in search of the Cailleach, the Queen of Winter. Finally, **REBEL MOON: WOLF: EX NIHILO – COSMOLOGY & TECHNOLOGY** (out now, Titan) is just the first of a pair of coffee-table making-of books about Zack Snyder's Netflix duology. The second volume is due in June.



FALL OF X FINALE

Going out with a bang

- **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
- Publisher **Marvel Comics**
- Writers **Gerry Duggan, Kieron Gillen**
- Artists **Lucas Werneck, RB Silva**

EVENT **No matter how** adventurous and experimental mainstream superhero comic-book sagas may get, they always eventually have to press the big red "reset" button and get everything back to the status quo.

Now, despite pulling off some of the wildest superhero storytelling in years, the sprawling saga of the X-Men's Krakoa civilisation is coming to an end. The last year of X-comics has been building towards this grand finale, all with the umbrella title *Fall Of X*, and it's being wrapped up in a homage to the Jonathan Hickman-penned *House Of X/Powers Of X* saga that started it all.

As with those interlinked titles, we have two heavily connected five-issue miniseries that together tell one story, bringing together all the threads from the previous five years of X-Men comics (and also connecting to all the current ongoing X-titles).

At time of writing we're three issues into both. **Fall Of The House Of X** ★★★☆☆ is the more traditional of the two, focusing on the threat of the Orchis organisation as they attempt to wipe out Mutantkind once and for all. Written by Gerry Duggan, it's a fast-paced and overstuffed adventure that barely pauses for breath in-between set-pieces. The furious action is fun, but Lucas Werneck's art isn't always impressive, and there aren't that many actual ideas on display here. Considering how ambitious and different most of the Krakoa-related stories have been, it's a bit of a letdown to get something that feels merely functional.

Thankfully, we also have **Rise Of The Powers Of X** ★★★★★, in which writer Kieron Gillen tackles some of the truly insane concepts at the heart of the Krakoa saga, as Professor X faces off against the all-consuming threat of the Dominion and the cunning plans of the various incarnations of Mr Sinister. Backed up by excellent art from RB Silva, this is a satisfying and unpredictable experience that pushes the complexity and weirdness of X-Men comics about as far as it will go.

> "The stories don't always make for an elegant combination"

With two issues yet to come, it's still difficult to predict how this is all going to wrap up (except for the fact that the time-altering abilities of Moira McTaggart are going to have *something* to do with it). The twin stories of *Fall/Rise* don't always make for an elegant combination, and they are also certainly way too complicated for anyone other than dedicated X-Men fans to unravel.

Still, so far they are delivering an entertainingly bombastic wrap-up to one of the most fascinating superhero relaunches in years.

Saxon Bullock

i Gillen is also writing a four-issue miniseries, *X-Men Forever*, that ties into *Fall/Rise* (and wraps up his *Immortal X-Men* saga).

Wolverine: a harsh critic of other men's belts.

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

★★★★☆

- **RELEASED OUT NOW!**
- Publisher **Marvel Comics**
- Writer **Jonathan Hickman**
- Artists **Marco Checchetto**

ISSUES 1-3 **Marvel's reboot** of its Ultimate universe got off to a mildly perplexing start in 2023, but this first ongoing Ultimate series is the shot in the arm the project needed. *Ultimate Spider-Man* keeps the worldbuilding from last year's *Ultimate Invasion* in the background, and instead builds an accessible superhero adventure with interesting new angles on Spidey's mythology.

The basic set-up is that in the new Ultimate universe, Peter Parker gains his powers 20 years after he should have done, meaning we've got a new Spider-Man who's in his late thirties, married to Mary Jane Watson, and father to two precocious children.

We also get some different character relationships – most notably that Uncle Ben is still alive, working as a journalist, and is best friends with J Jonah Jameson. These opening issues follow Peter's initial struggles with being a superhero.

The storytelling is in slow-burn mode (with occasional eye-catching action set-pieces), but writer Jonathan Hickman gives the series the kind of warmth and heart that a Spider-Man story needs, helped by crisp, well-executed art from Marco Checchetto. It's still questionable how well the Ultimate revival is working overall, but this alternate version of Spidey is intriguing and charming enough.

Saxon Bullock

40 YEARS OF SCREAM!

★★★★☆

- RELEASED **25 APRIL**
- Publisher **Rebellion**
- Writers/artists **Various**

COLLECTION **Despite running** for only 15 weeks in 1984, torpedoed by industrial action and senior management jitters, British horror comic *Scream!* is fondly remembered. This £45 hardback (469 pages) collects the whole kit and caboodle.

Featuring the work of a host of *2000 AD* contributors, it's delightfully gruesome. The editors clearly knew what kids wanted: giant spiders, zombies, mummies, and all manner of slathering, toothy monstrosity.

Three core strips previously received standalone releases. "The Dracula Files" effectively transplants the Count into a Cold War landscape of MI5 operatives and double-decker buses. In "Monster", a lad discovers a Quasimodo-esque uncle in the attic, who keeps forgetting his "No more killing!" rule. And in "The Thirteenth Floor", tower block computer Max punishes burglars, bullies and the like.

All are a tad repetitious, so it's a delight to enjoy anthology slots such as "Library Of Death" – very much in the EC Comics tradition – and limited series like demonically-infested house tale "The Nightcomers". The "Ghastly Tale!" one-pager is hit and miss (often just a corny gag), while *Munsters*-esque comedy strip "Fiends And Neighbours" won't raise a titter from anyone in long trousers.

And sadly, the collection *doesn't* come with a cover-mounted set of vampire fangs or scary spider. Tsk. **Ian Berriman**

...NOT IT CAN'T... THIS CAN'T BE REAL!
I CAN'T BE HERE.
OH, BUT YOU ARE.
IF I'M AWAKE, THAT MEANS...
...THAT MEANS YOU HAVE NO POWER OVER ME.
LET ME GO!
IT IS AS YOU WISH.
Well, that seemed surprisingly simple.

SOMNA

SFX Loves

Dreams Less Sweet

★★★★★

- RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
- Publisher **DSTLRY**
- Writer/artists **Becky Cloonan, Tula Lotay**

ISSUES 1-3 **Publisher DSTLRY** launched last year with a roster of high-profile comics creators and the promise of doing things a little bit differently to the likes of Marvel and DC. It's still early days for the company, but with *Somna* they have their first bona-fide instant classic.

The three-issue series blurs the lines between folk horror and female-gaze erotica. Ingrid is a woman living in 16th century England. Her husband Roland is the local witchfinder, which puts her in a comparatively privileged position compared to her neighbours, but at night she's beset by visitations.

These are perhaps a nasty case of sleep paralysis, or possibly the actual Devil himself. As these experiences worsen, the lines between Ingrid's waking and sleeping hours begin to blur, and the locals begin to view her with increased suspicion.

> **"Blurs the lines between folk horror and erotica"**

This is a strikingly beautiful comic book. Cloonan and Lotay – both writers and artists – divide each issue into Ingrid's waking and sleeping hours, with Cloonan taking the former and Lotay the latter. In the daytime the book has a realistic look and muted colours as Ingrid navigates her increasingly perilous situation.

In her sleeping hours, however, the art style shifts. Things become looser, more fluid... and just a little bit sexy. As much as this is a tale of the monstrous misogyny of the time period, it's also a dream logic exploration of Ingrid's anxieties and frustrated desires.

As the story reaches its, ahem, climax, the lines between the dream world and reality dissolve almost entirely. An unsettling comic that's haunting, strange and unforgettable.

Will Salmon

i Inspirations included Robert Eggers's *The Witch*, *The Devil Rides Out*, *Blood On Satan's Claw* and Hammer's *The Witches*.

ACTION COMICS: "I, BIZARRO"

★★★★☆

- RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
- Publisher **DC Comics**
- Writer **Jason Aaron**
- Artist **John Timms**

ISSUES 1061-1063 **DC is trying** something a little different with *Action Comics* this year. The publisher's new "Superman Superstars" initiative pairs high-profile writers and artists for discreet three-issue arcs. The first of these, "I, Bizarro", sees recent Marvel defector Jason Aaron team up with artist John Timms to tell a tale centred on the Man of Steel's goofiest foe.

Bizarro – basically a dumb as rocks mirror image of Superman – is rarely portrayed as anything other than an admittedly powerful joke. Here, however, he becomes a major threat when his apparent death magically transforms everyone in the city into Bizarro refections of themselves.

Superman can be a hard character to get right, but Aaron and Timms nail the tone perfectly. "I, Bizarro" is a delicious mix of humour – usually good-natured and sweet, occasionally strikingly dark – sincere character beats, and explosive action, depicted by Timms in satisfyingly crunchy fights. It's all leading up to Superman teaming up with the Joker, here transformed into the sanest man on Earth by Bizarro's spell.

"I, Bizarro" doesn't reinvent the Man of Steel's adventures, but it is hugely entertaining, with a nice line in subtle strangeness. DC: give this team an ongoing Superman comic pronto. **Will Salmon**

DRAGON'S DOGMA 2

Arisen again

★★★★½

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Reviewed on **PS5**
Also available on **Xbox Series S|X, PC**
Publisher **Capcom**

VIDEOGAME **Swing a broadsword** in a gaming shop and you'll likely hit one of several dozen fantastical open worlds on offer. *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey*, *Elden Ring*, *Skyrim*... *Dragon's Dogma 2* is one of them, though among this hoard of treasures it glitters like no other. This is an open world adventure like little else, one that empowers you to hit the road and have an adventure on your own by following the wind as you see fit.

Which isn't to say there's no story at all. When a dragon descends on the kingdom, the beast *literally* steals your heart, marking you as the Arisen – now capable of wielding magical, enhanced power but fated to do battle with the fiend. Your journey towards this ultimate goal, however, is left mostly blank.

You travel across two kingdoms: one of men in the oft-green Vermund, and one of beastren in the much more arid Batthal. You'll unravel political intrigue, and a plot to undermine your prophesied ascension. You'll hack at a cyclops' ankles as he falls over a ravine and grabs onto the precipice on both sides.

You'll grab a harpy's legs and ride along towards out-of-reach treasure. You'll get jumped by a griffin mid-bust-up with goblins and, caught unawares, end up tumbling into a deep river where the tentacles of "The Brine" will pull you under. Or perhaps you won't. Epic and slapstick in equal measure, there's a devotion to physics-based altercations (you can grab onto any enemy, big and small). Freeform quest design means that uncovering your own story is always intuitive.

Waypoints for quests you agree to undertake are often mere suggestions, leaving you to figure out your solution from one of many. How do you sneak into a palace? Pass a border gate? Learn someone's secrets? From dress-up to tailing, it's often in your hands. Venture off the beaten track, and you'll find your own little points of interest. Whatever your path, the game answers with something unique, making this something that feels authored by you as much as the designer. **Oscar Taylor-Kent**

i Some of the official "Pawns" that you can hire to help you are based on popular YouTubers or Twitch streamers.

"Can anyone remember how Sinbad beat Talos?"

STAR WARS: UNLIMITED

★★★★☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Players **Two+**
Publisher **Fantasy Flight Games**

TRADING CARD GAME **If you've so** much as cracked open a booster pack, you'll know that trading card games can be trickier to get into than a briar thicket. They're dense with terms you'll need a glossary to understand, and it's easy to trip up on their convoluted strategies.

However, much like *Disney Lorcana* a few months ago, *Star Wars Unlimited* takes a hatchet to all this. While it's still couched in tactical smarts, *Unlimited* is much more accessible than the likes of *Magic: The Gathering* or the *Pokémon Trading Card Game*. It feels like a good middle ground between their complexity and 's *Lorcana*'s family-friendly straightforwardness.

In this tabletop spin on a galaxy far, far away, you take control of either the Rebels or the Empire. Your aim is to reduce your opponent's base to zero hit points while simultaneously protecting your own, and you do this via iconic heroes used to beat the stuffing out of your opponents.

Most abilities are fairly self-explanatory or describe what to do on the cards. Meanwhile, being able to turn any card into a resource (unlike *MTG* or *Pokémon*) really streamlines things. However, the inclusion of a leader and two different battlefields – ground and space – gives the game enough spice to differentiate it from the competition.

Benjamin Abbott

FELLFOUL

★★★★½

RELEASED **30 APRIL**
13 minutes | **Vinyl/download**
Publisher **Mulgrave Audio**

AUDIO DRAMA **The second** release from Mulgrave Audio is a slight affair – just 13 minutes long, enough for two sides of 10" vinyl – but it provides another strong indication of what this new label is all about.

Young Eleanor Wood (Aja Dodd) discovers that an obscure cult fantasy film, *Fellfoul*, was shot near her house. Intrigued, she investigates the novel series that the movie was based on, but finds herself pulled into a mystery.

Written by label co-founder Andrew Orton, *Fellfoul* is a pitch-perfect conjuring of a specific era and mood. While the plot is rooted in the world of cheap paperback sword-and-sorcery novels, *Fellfoul* also strongly evokes Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*. It's effectively a one-woman dramatisation of a short story, with Dodd ably performing Eleanor and the other characters, but the conceit works well given that the story is told entirely from her point of view.

Fitting too is the music by Ghost Box Records' Belbury Poly, which evokes that '80s BBC incidental music feel. A soundtrack download is included with the package, as is a page of an imagined *Fellfoul* comic drawn by comics legend John Ridgway. Lovely stuff.

Our only criticism is with regards to the length, which was presumably dictated by the physical format. A brief but beautiful release steeped in eerie nostalgia.

Will Salmon

"How do you kill what does not live?" With a gun.

ALONE IN THE DARK

Bad Manor

★★★☆☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
Reviewed on **PS5**
Also on **Xbox Series S|X, PC**
Publisher **THQ Nordic**

VIDEOGAME **Some of the reception** to this reboot of the original groundbreaking 1992 game has been so hostile that you'd think Uwe Boll was directing again. Shame, because there's actually a lot to like here.

Playing as either Edward Carnby (David Harbour) or Emily Hartwood (Jodie Comer), you explore Derceto Manor, a building with a sinister past and not exactly a joyous and lovely present.

> **"Brainteasers are clever and beautifully constructed"**

Though there's the odd effective jump scare, combat is often more tedious than terrifying, and too many of the horror tricks (sneak past the blind monster, throw bottles to distract enemies) have been seen way too many times before. It's sad to see that the series which started 3D survival horror is now so utterly derivative of the far superior *Resident Evil*.

Still, exploring the manor is actually a lot of fun. You gradually unlock this sprawling space by collecting keys and solving puzzles, and this is where *Alone In The Dark* steps out of the shadow of better games. Its best brainteasers are clever, beautifully constructed conundrums. Often you're given a bunch of clues and left to figure things out for yourself. It's great to see a modern game with the confidence to stall your progress unless you properly engage your brain.

If that confidence had been seen in the rest of this reboot we could have had something really special here. Books you find contain wonderfully sinister bits of spooky writing too, that the game frustratingly never makes good on. Alas, it's just too generic to earn a place among gaming horror's modern greats.

Abbie Stone

i People who pre-ordered the game are able to play as the hilariously outdated skins from the 1992 original.

DOCTOR WHO: THE QUIN DILEMMA

★★★★☆

RELEASED **OUT NOW!**
236 minutes | **CD/download**
Publisher **Big Finish**

AUDIO DRAMA **22 March marked** 40 years since the broadcast of "The Twin Dilemma" – the Sixth Doctor's debut, notorious for both its general poor quality and the Time Lord's attempt to strangle companion Peri. This six-part box takes inspiration from that story and crafts a superior one.

"The Exaltation" sets the scene, as the Doctor and Mel explore the planet Arunopal just as King Otho declares his successor: whichever of his five sons brings him the Doctor! He's not after just one Doc through, sending them out across space to find different versions of Six.

"Escape From Holy Island" is a slight but touching story which sees the Doctor and Peri helping to defend Lindisfarne from attackers before the Doc is transported away. "Sibling Rivalry/Children Of the Revolution" is the weak point, a two-parter where the Doctor, Constance and Flip help fight off a Sontaran invasion.

"The Thousand Year Thaw" sees another prince attempt to capture another Doctor; the highlight here is a conversation between Six and an older Peri, reinforcing the importance of their friendship while confronting its rocky start.

Finally, "The Firstborn" wraps things up with a clever flourish that's a little too neat but feels just right, plus a celebration of the Sixth Doctor and all his companions. Happy birthday, Sixie. **Rhian Drinkwater**

Blastermind
The SFX quiz

THE SUN

Here's 20 questions about that big ball of flame in the sky. Can you shed any light on them?

Quizmaster **Ian Berriman, Deputy Editor**

QUESTION 4

QUESTION 8

QUESTION 12

QUESTION 16

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QUESTION 1
In the 1961 film *The Day The Earth Caught Fire*, what causes a shift in Earth's orbit which sends it moving towards the Sun?

QUESTION 2
Earth's yellow sun is what gives Kryptonians like Superman their superpowers. But what kind of sun drains those powers?

QUESTION 3
In *New Mutants*, what is the superhero monicker of Roberto da Costa?

QUESTION 4 Picture Question
Name this television series.

QUESTION 5
In *The Marvels*, what does the Kree leader Dar-Benn try to do to the Sun?

QUESTION 6
In which *Star Trek* episode did James T Kirk first travel in time by performing a slingshot manoeuvre around the Sun?

QUESTION 7
Which James Bond movie revolves around a piece of solar cell technology called the solex agitator?

QUESTION 8 Picture Question
Identify this *Doctor Who* episode.

QUESTION 9
In which 2009 blockbuster is it discovered that the Earth is fated to be destroyed on 19 October by a massive solar flare?

QUESTION 10
Which SF author wrote the 1953 short story "The Golden Apples Of The Sun"?

QUESTION 11
Name the '90s DC Comics storyline which saw Earth descending into chaos after a giant entity known as the Sun-Eater envelops the Sun.

QUESTION 12 Picture Question
Name this movie about a solar space mission.

QUESTION 13
In *Heroes*, what event seems to trigger various characters' powers (and, in a later episode, causes them to disappear again)?

QUESTION 14
Which fantasy gamebook hero has a sun-powered weapon called the Sommerswerd?

QUESTION 15
Which classic film ends with a sacrifice to the Sun God Nuada?

QUESTION 16 Picture Question
Supply the title that's been removed from this movie poster.

QUESTION 17
Which Gerry Anderson TV series has an episode centred on a mission called Operation Sun Probe?

QUESTION 18
Who wrote the 1957 novel *The Black Cloud*, in which a giant gaseous lifeform causes panic by blocking the sun's radiation?

QUESTION 19
In the 1969 film *Journey To The Far Side Of The Sun*, what does a space mission discover there?

QUESTION 20
In *Superman IV: The Quest For Peace*, what does Superman throw into the Sun?

Answers

1 Nuclear testing 2 A red sun 3 Sunspot 4 *Hard Sun* 5 Steal its energy 6 "Tomorrow is Yesterday" 7 *The Man With The Golden Gun* 8 "The End Of The World" 9 *Knowing* 10 Ray Bradbury 11 *The Final Night* 12 *Sunshine* 13 A solar eclipse 14 Lone Wolf 15 *The Wicker Man* 16 *Hideous Sun Demon* 17 *Thunderbirds* 18 Fred Hoyle 19 A mirror-image Earth 20 All of Earth's nuclear weapons

How did you do?

How brilliantly are you shining?

0-5 Night

6-10 Overcast

11-15 Intermittent sunshine

16-19 Bright

20 Scorchio!

SFX

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"I bet it's the consistency of lumpy porridge"

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YOU KNOW WHO!
DOCTOR WHO SEASON ONE CONTINUES

FURIOSA
THIS IS BECOMING A SAGA NOW

STAR WARS: THE ACOLYTE
THE LIGHTSABER IS *WHAT* COLOUR?

SECRET WARS AT 40
SLAY YOUR ENEMIES!

THE STRANGERS
IS TAMARA HOME?

PLUS! Dinosaurs, spiders and crows, oh my!

SFX 379 ON SALE 15 MAY

All contents are subject to change – the laws of time aren't ours to command

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Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi and fantasy

Carl Betz and Clint Walker, bravely hiding.

Killdozer

Will Salmon, Editor, Newsarama

In my head it was a Sunday afternoon at about 3.30pm and on ITV when I first encountered *Killdozer*. I've no idea if that's actually true or not, but that's the half-memory that always comes to mind when I think of this prosaic, yet weirdly memorable made-for-TV thriller.

Based on a novella by Theodore Sturgeon, it tells the story of a meteor that crashes to Earth and – in a flash of special effects and the burble of a vintage synthesiser – unleashes an alien force that possesses an unmanned bulldozer and sends it on a murderous rampage. A quick glance at the internet tells me that the screening I saw may have been in 1988 and that feels about right – I would have been eight.

It's the colours I remember most of all. The film takes place on a construction site on a remote African island (in actuality a very recognisable California) and is visually characterised by hazy golden sands, the bright orange of protective hard hats, and sudden bursts of electric blue representing the malevolent ET stalking the ill-fated workmen.

It has a gorgeously dreamy visual quality, enhanced by a score that mixes bombastic orchestral moments with dissonant squalls of primitive synthesiser. A US Blu-ray is available, but I suspect that a clean transfer would rob the film of some of the midnight movie quality that accompanies the bleary-eyed nth generation copy viewable on YouTube.

The other thing that stands out to me about *Killdozer* is its oddly fatalistic tone. There's a line about halfway through the film that chilled me at the time and still makes me shiver. As the horror of their situation begins to dawn on the crew, Dutch (James Wainwright) says blankly, "You and me Chub. We're gonna be on the beach pretty soon, stretched out Chub. Four little bodies all in a row." Genuinely unsettling in its bitter resignation and acceptance of violent death by construction machinery.

All this is not to say that *Killdozer* is a great, or even a particularly *good* film. It's slow and silly, with the titular 'dozer rarely terribly threatening. But it has bags of atmosphere and an air of the inexplicable that's lingered in my brain for more than 30 years now.

Will is now something of an expert on different models of Caterpillar bulldozers.

Fact Attack!

→ **Theodore Sturgeon's original 1944 novella was written in nine days after the author had suffered a bout of writer's block.**

→ **The novella explains that Earth was once the site of a war between an ancient empire and a race of alien energy beings.**

→ **The bulldozer in the film is a Caterpillar D9 – a model launched in 1954. In the novella it was a Caterpillar D7 (1938, if you're wondering).**

→ **A comic adaptation titled "The Thing Called... Killdozer" was published in Marvel's *Worlds Unknown* the same year as the film.**

→ **The '80s band Killdozer (debut LP: *Intellectuals Are The Shoeshine Boys Of The Ruling Elite*) were named after the film.**

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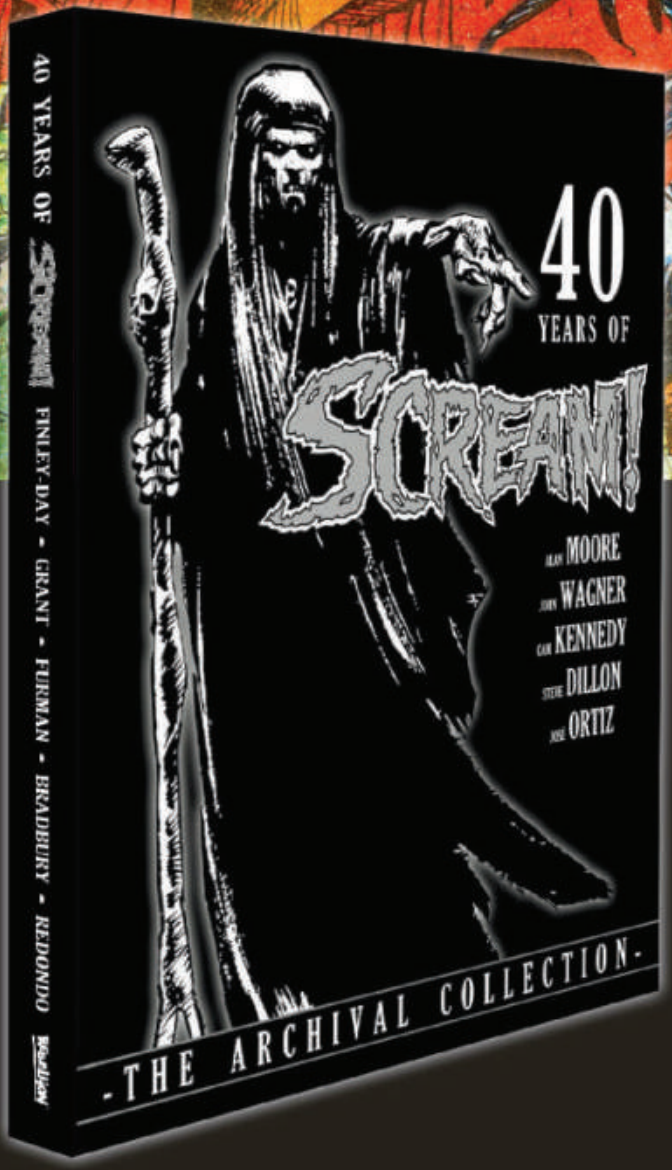
DEFINITELY NOT FOR THE NERVOUS!



SCREAM!

-THE ARCHIVAL COLLECTION-

Celebrating forty years since IPC launched the UK's most iconic horror anthology, this single volume collects all the strips included in the fifteen-issue run of **Scream!**.

Produced 'from the depths' of King's Reach Tower by the mysterious undead editor Ghastly McNasty, the first issue of **Scream!** was unleashed on 24 March 1984. An immediate hit with fans, the comic featured strips plucked from the fevered imaginations of British comic-book legends such as **Alan Moore**, **John Wagner**, **Alan Grant**, **Simon Furman** and **Gerry Finley-Day**, all beautifully realised by artists including **Eric Bradbury**, **Cam Kennedy**, **José Ortiz**, **Ron Smith**, **Steve Dillon** and **Jesus Redondo**.

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